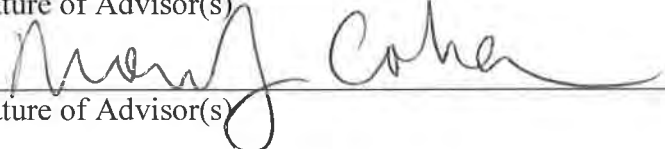
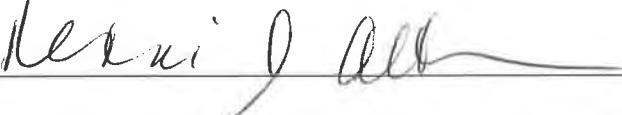




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HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

THE DEATH OF MOSES

פטירת משה רבינו ע"ה

Translation and Commentary by ADAM WILLIAM COHEN LUTZ

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of Requirements for Ordination

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INTRODUCTION

Moses is one of the most interesting and mysterious characters in the Bible. At times he wields the power of God, argues with God, and even advises God. Moses is such a powerful and important figure in the story of the Exodus that we don't include him in the retelling of the Passover story out of fear that we might worship him over God. Yet, at other times, Moses succumbs to very human emotions: anger, frustration, and impatience. He initially refuses God's call, chastises the Israelites on many occasions, and strikes a rock to receive water when he has received explicit instructions to speak to it instead. Moses is such a central figure in the Bible that four out of the five books of the Pentateuch deal with him and his leadership of the People of Israel. Even though Moses' power and importance appears much greater than his faults, he is still forbidden from entering the Promised Land and is sentenced to die apart from his people.

The Five Books of Moses end with his death, but we are never told about it in detail. What was Moses thinking? How did he feel to never experience the fruits of his labors? How did the Israelite People react to losing the man who led them out of slavery, through the wilderness, and eventually to the shores of the Promised Land? How did Joshua feel receiving the baton of leadership from his master? Moses' end appears so tragic, did he not receive any reward for all his years of service to the People of Israel and to God? In *Midrash Petirat Moshe*, the rabbis attempt to supply answers to all these questions and more through their interpretation of the events leading up to Moses' death.

History of the Text

Midrash Petirat Moshe is a compilation of many earlier traditions surrounding Moses' death. I have done my best to cite as many of these traditions as I could, and they can be found noted throughout the midrash. The earliest manuscript of this text is a 13th C text from Parma (Parma 327, 27). Other versions can be found dating from 14th C Germany to 19th C India. Despite these various versions, this translation and commentary focuses on the version J. D. Eisenstein presents in his midrashic compilation, Otzar Midrashim. Eisenstein uses a text called *Jellinek-A*, which can also be found in A. Jellinek's midrashic compilation, Bet ha-Midrash. This is the best or one of the best extant versions and is quite complete.

Layout and Method

The translation of *Midrash Petirat Moshe*, which begins on page 2, contains the Hebrew text on the upper right hand side of the page and my English translation on the upper left hand side of the page. I take sole responsibility for the translation. Within the English text, superscript numbers can be found which indicate that part of the text is quoted below in the commentary. Each piece of commentary is meant to help the reader better understand the particular text; either to bring clarity to a difficult text or explain how that particular text responds to a circulating tradition. At other times the commentary will explain traditions not mentioned in *Midrash Petirat Moshe*, but in other parallel sources, to help the reader understand how a particular text reading found in *Midrash Petirat Moshe* stands at odds with, or does not reflect a popular tradition found in other sources.

The text itself is divided up into seven sections. Each section reflects an overall theme which dominates each particular section. They do not depend on their length. As such, Sections 1-6 are approximately the same length as Section 7. Sometimes sections are divided into sub-sections and even sub-sub-sections to help the reader better understand how *Midrash Petirat Moshe* expands and contracts various themes throughout the midrash.

In order to offer the reader the best possible translation, the English is idiomatic. The English translation is true to the Hebrew text, but is translated to make the most sense to an English reader. However, it does its best to consistently translate Hebrew phrases. One visual difference between the Hebrew text and English translation is that in the Hebrew text, the Biblical quotations appear in the same style as the rest of the text and thus are harder to differentiate. The English translation, however, italicizes all Biblical references to visually point out to the reader where *Midrash Petirat Moshe* quotes from Scripture. Similarly, within the English translation, the reader will find parenthesis, most of which do not appear in the Hebrew text and should not be read as part of the English text. Most are Scriptural citations and are meant to help the reader locate particular texts. Additionally, the English translation includes square brackets. These cases should be read with the text. Sometimes it is unclear who is speaking in the Hebrew text or it is unclear why a particular partial biblical citation is being used. The square brackets are my additions to help the reader better understand the text and the Scriptural citations.

ABBREVIATIONS AND OTHER CONVENTIONS

Abbreviations of Primary Works

ARNA	Avot de Rabbi Nathan ver. A
ARNB	Avot de Rabbi Nathan ver. B
BT	Babylonian Talmud
CJ	Chronicles of Jerahmeel
DeutR	Deuteronomy Rabbah
ExR	Exodus Rabbah
EY	Ein Y'akov
Jos	Josephus
LevR	Leviticus Rabbah
LotJ	Legends of the Jews
LotJN	Legends of the Jews Notes
MdRI	Mekhilta de'Rabbi Ishmael
MidrPM	Midrash Death of Moses
MidrPss	Midrash on Psalms
MidrTan	Midrash Tanḥuma (Buber)
NJPS	New JPS Tanakh (1985)
NumR	Numbers Rabbah
PA	Pirke Avot
PdRK	Pesikta de'Rav Kahana
PSPH	Pseudo-Philo
PT	Palestinian Talmud
SD	Sifre Deuteronomy
SN	Sifre Numbers
Tos	Tosefta
TY	Targum Yerushalmi
YS	Yalkut Shim'omni

Abbreviations of Biblical Books

Dan.	Daniel
Deut.	Deuteronomy
Ecc.	Ecclesiastes
Ex.	Exodus
Ezek.	Ezekiel
Gen.	Genesis
Hos.	Hosea
I Sam.	I Samuel
Isa.	Isaiah
Jer.	Jeremiah
Josh.	Joshua
Lev.	Leviticus
Mal.	Malachi
Mic.	Micah
Num.	Numbers
Prov.	Proverbs
Ps.	Psalms
SoS.	Song of Solomon

Abbreviations of Parshiot and Talmudic Tractates

Besh	Beshalah
Huk	Hukkat
Sot	Sotah
VE	va'Ethanan
VY	vaYelekh
VZB	V'zot ha'Berakhah
Shab	Shabbat
Ned	Nedarim
AZ	Avodah Zarah
Men	Menaḥot
Hag	Hagigah
BB	Baba Batra
Taan	Ta'anit
Ber	Berakhot

Transliteration of the Hebrew Consonants

'	alef
‘	ayin
b	bet
g	gimel
d	dalet
h	heh
v	vet, vav
z	zayin
ḥ	het
t	tet, tav
y	yod
k	kaf
kh	khaf
l	lamed
m	mem
n	nun
s	samekh, sin
p	peh
f	feh
tz	tzadi
k	kof
r	resh
sh	shin

Pronunciation Guide for Vowels

a	as in <i>farm</i>
ai	as in <i>eye</i>
e	as in <i>dent</i>
ei	as in <i>hay</i>
i	as in <i>hit</i> or <i>heat</i>
o	as in <i>hope</i>
u	as in <i>food</i>

TEXT, TRANSLATION, AND COMMENTARY TO THE DEATH OF MOSES

1 MOSES' NATURE

And this is the blessing that Moses, a man of God, blessed (Deut. 33:1)¹ – R. Samuel bar Nahmani said²: *כיון שבא משה לברך את [עמוד]* When Moses came to bless Israel, he blessed them with *זאת הברכה אשר ברך משה איש האלהים, אמר ר' שמואל בר נחמני* [362] *ישראל ברכם בזאת הברכה:* “*This is the blessing:*” and “*This*” is the Torah³, in which

1. *And this is the blessing that Moses, a man of God, blessed* The midrash opens with this verse from Deut. 33:1 (the opening of *Parashat VZB*) in order to ask two questions: 1) What was the blessing with which Moses blessed Israel? 2) What does “man of God mean?” See parallels in DeutR 11:4, MidrTan VZB, 2 and MidrPss 90.

2. *R. Samuel bar Nahmani* Probably refers to R. Samuel bar Nahman, as it is written in DeutR 11:4. Nahmani is a common alternative in the BT and sometimes in the PT. He was a third generation Amora from Palestine and a student of Jonathan ben Eleazar. Interestingly, his main student was R. Helbo (fourth generation Palestinian Amora) who is also interested in both questions cited above (see MidrPss 90:3).

3. “*This*” is the Torah Referring to the Hebrew *zot*, the midrash explains that “this” signifies the Torah; meaning Moses blessed Israel with the Torah. R. Samuel bar Nahmani’s student, R. Helbo, explains in MidrPss 90:3 that on the day Moses died, he wrote thirteen Torah scrolls, one for each of the twelve tribes and one to put in the Ark. All of these Torah scrolls existed so that no person could falsify the Torah’s teachings. In

it is written, *And this is the blessing that Moses, a man of God, blessed* (ibid.) – “Man of God” means Moses;⁴ אשר ברך משה איש האלהים, וזאת הברכה, “Man, God” means The Holy One,⁵ Blessed be He, of אלהים זה משה, איש האלהים זה whom it is written, *The Eternal is a man of war* (Ex. 15:3). And why is all this?⁶ To fulfil the Scriptural verse, וכל כך למה, לקיים מה שנאמר

essence then, Moses’ blessing was to hand over accurately the teaching he received from God to the people of Israel.

4. “Man of God” means Moses Here, the midrash appears to combine two earlier Midrashic traditions (DeutR 11:4 and MidrTan 11:2). However, there is another tradition (MidrPss 90:5) that איש האלהים, “man of God,” refers to Moses because Moses was both God and man (see below for more on this tradition). Alternatively, a different tradition (MidrTan 11:2) explains that “man of God,” means that Moses’ relationship to God was like that of wife and husband.

5. “Man, God” means The Holy One Here the midrash reflects a tradition from DeutR 11:4 which explains that not only did Moses bless Israel alone, but God and the Torah also blessed Israel. וזאת הברכה, “and this is the blessing,” tells us that the Torah blessed Israel, אשר ברך משה, “which Moses blessed,” tells us that Moses blessed Israel, and איש האלהים, “man of God,” tells us that God blessed Israel. However, by combining all the previous traditions (DeutR 11:4, MidrPss 90:5, and MidrTan 11:2).

6. And why is all this? MidrPM takes this question and answer based on Ecc. from DeutR 11:4. In the context of DeutR 11:4, it makes more sense; God, Torah, and Moses

And a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Ecc. 4:12). והחוט המשולש לא במהרה ינתק.
 R. Tanḥuma said⁷: “*Man of God*” – if [Moses is referred to as] man, why [also] God? When he fled from Pharaoh, למה אלהים? אלא כשברח לפני
 he was called “man” (Ex. 2:14), when he went up to פרעה נקרא איש, כשעלה לרקיע
 heaven, he was called “God.” נקרא אלהים.

(the “threefold chord”) are a combination that is extremely powerful. But, here MidrPM uses a “threefold chord” (drawing on DeutR 11:4, MidrPss 90:5, and MidrTan 11:2) to explain that Moses is both god, and man and in partnership with God, while, at the same time, God is both God and man. The combination here points to a Divine/human relationship between Moses and God which blurs the lines between humans and God, but in doing so, strengthens the relationship.

7. R. Tanḥuma said R. Tanḥuma was a fifth generation Amora from Palestine. He was a student of R. Huna (third generation Babylonian Amora) who also taught R. Ḥelbo. This tradition (DeutR 11:4) explains how Moses can be like man and god. DeutR 11:4 gives many examples of Moses’ actions to demonstrate when he acts like a man or like a god. Specific to the example here in MidrPM, Moses is like a man when we flees from Pharaoh, but like a god when he uses godly powers. However, MidrPM does not want to focus on Moses’ use of godly powers; it is more interested in Moses’ ascension to heaven. MidrPM’s editorial choice here helps further Moses’ nature as man and God; Moses not only can perform godly wonders on Earth, but he can actually ascend to heaven. See Ex. 19:20, for the biblical story.

2 MOSES' MERIT

For what did Moses merit that The Holy One, Blessed and
 be He, occupied Godself with [burying] him?⁸ When he
 went down to Egypt and the [time] for the redemption of
 Israel arrived, all of [Israel] was busy with [gathering]
 silver and gold, but Moses was busy going around the
 city for three days and three nights in order to find
 Joseph's coffin, since they only could leave Egypt if
 they carried Joseph's bones with them⁹, as it is written,
Joseph made the sons of Israel swear etc. (Gen. 50:25).
 When Moses was seeking the whereabouts of Joseph's
 coffin, Sarah, daughter of Asher, met him, exhausted

ומפני מה זכה משה שהקב"ה נתעסק
 בו? שבשעה שירד למצרים
 כשהגיעה גאולתן של ישראל היו
 כולם עוסקים בשאילת כסף וזהב,
 ומשה היה טרוד ומסבב את העיר
 שלשה ימים ושלשה לילות למצוא
 ארונו של יוסף, לפי שלא היו יכולין
 לצאת ממצרים אלא אם יעלו עמהם
 עצמות יוסף, שנאמר וישבע יוסף את
 בני ישראל וגו'. וכשהיה משה מבקש
 ארונו של יוסף היכן הוא, פגעה בו

8. *For what did Moses merit that The Holy One* MidrPM reiterates a popular tradition (see Tos Sot 4:8, PT Sot 7, SN 106, and CJ 51) which ascribes Moses' merit to his searching for Joseph's bones upon the Israelite's departure from Egypt. See many versions of the tradition of Joseph's coffin, e.g., Tos Sot 4:7, MidrTan Besh 2 and DeutR 11:7.

9. *they only could leave Egypt* Before Joseph dies Genesis, he makes Israel vow to bring his bones back to the Land of Israel when God redeems them. Apparently, only Moses and the Egyptians remember this promise because the Egyptians sink Joseph's coffin in the Nile to prevent Israel from ever leaving Egypt. Other earlier traditions place Moses' bones in a double cave or in the treasure houses of the palace, perhaps the pyramids.

and tired. She said to him, "Why are you so troubled?" סרה בת אשר עיף ויגע, אמרה לו
 He said to her, "I'm busy [looking for] the coffin of למה אתה טרוד כל כך, אמר לה על
 Joseph. She said to him, "Come with me to the Nile and ארונו של יוסף אני טרוד, אמרה לו
 I will show you where it is."¹⁰ [Moses] went with her. בא עמי לנילוס ואראך היכן הוא,
 She said to him, "His coffin is in this place." [The הלך עמה אמרה לו במקום הזה הוא
 Egyptians] made the [coffin] out of lead and sealed it on ארונו. ועשו אותו מעופרת וחתמו
 the four sides, because the magicians said to Pharaoh: אותו מארבע רבעיו, שכך אמרו
 the Egyptians will know that Israel cannot leave Egypt החרטומים אל פרעה וידעו המצריים
 until they raise Joseph's coffin, because they knew the שאין ישראל יכולין לצאת ממצרים
 content of the oath that he imposed on them. Therefore, עד שיעלו ארונו של יוסף, לפי שהם
 they agreed with their magicians and they made a coffin יודעים חומר השבועה שהשביע
 out of lead with all kinds of witchcraft. And this is its אותם, ולכך הסכימו עם מכשפות
 place. Immediately, Moses opened his mouth and said, שלהם ועשו ארון של עופרת במיני
 "Joseph! Joseph! You know that the time of Israel's כשפים, וזה הוא מקומו. מיד פתח
 redemption has arrived and you made them swear that משה פיו ואמר יוסף יוסף אתה יודע
 they would not leave Egypt, without bringing up your שהגיע זמן גאולתם של ישראל ואתה
 bones. And now give honor to the God of Israel and השבעת אותם שלא יעלו ממצרים עד
 don't delay their redemption and quickly rise from the שיעלו עצמותיך, ועתה תן כבוד
 depths." Immediately, Joseph's coffin began to move לאלהי ישראל ואל תאחר גאולתם

10. *I will show you where it is* *The Rabbis believed that Seraḥ bat Asher lived through the entire period of slavery in Egypt based on her being mentioned in Gen. 46:17 on the list of tribes and in Num. 26:46, listing the tribes near the end of the desert journey.*

and rise from the depths and float on the surface of the water. Moses took [the coffin and placed] it on his shoulders and he went along with it.¹¹ But Israel took all the silver and gold, and clothes and dresses of the Egyptians, but Moses was not concerned about this. On the contrary, he was enormously happy because he took the coffin of Joseph. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses, “Moses! By your life¹², you have not done a small thing. Because you didn’t concern [yourself] with *silver and gold etc.*, I, too, [will do what is not a small thing].”

ועלה במהרה מהתהום, מיד התחיל ארונו של יוסף להתנענע ועלה מתהומות וצף על פני המים. נטלו משה על כתפיו והלך עמו, וישראל נטלו כל כסף וזהב ובגדים ושמלות של מצרים, ומשה לא חשב על זה אלא אדרבא היתה לו שמחה גדולה כי נטל ארון יוסף. אמר הקב"ה למשה, משה! חיידך לא דבר קטן עשית בשביל שלא חששת על כסף וזהב וכו', גם אני בשעת סילוקך אני

11. *Moses took [the coffin and placed] it on his shoulders* As opposed to the Israelites who were busy taking silver, gold, and fine linens, Moses placed a coffin of lead on his shoulders as the Israelites left Egypt. For this act, Moses merits God’s personal attention to Moses’ burial. It is almost as if Moses “carried Israel” through the desert (a metaphor perhaps).

12. *By your life* This expression, “by your life,” is a Biblical formulation of vowing. The upholding of vows is important in MidrPM. Later in the midrash, both Moses and God invoke vows to persuade the other. So, it is significant that here, MidrPM emphasizes Moses upholding a vow which results in not only merit from God, but also eliciting a vow from God to bury Moses.

thing]. When you depart [from this world], I myself will attend to your bier and no one else in the world.”
 הוא המתעסק במטתך ולא שום אדם בעולם.

3 MOSES' FATE

3.1 MOSES PLEADS WITH GOD

When the time arrived for Moses,¹³ our teacher, peace be upon him, to leave this world, The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, “*Behold, the days of your death approach* (Deut. 31:14).” [Moses] responded, “Master of the World, after all that I have labored,¹⁴ you say to me that I will die. *I shall not die, but live*”
 וכשהגיע יומו של מרע"ה ליפטר מן העולם א"ל הקב"ה הן קרבו ימיו למות, אמר לפניו רבש"ע אחר כל היגיעה שיגעתי תאמר לי

13. *When the time arrived for Moses* By splitting the first half of the Biblical verse in two, MidrPM reimagines the verse from Deut. 31:14 as a conversation between Moses and God. For a parallel tradition, see DeutR. 11:8-9.

14. *after all that I have labored* Though Moses argues for his life by invoking his labors as a leader, MidrPM acknowledges Moses' transgressions through the invocation of Ps. 118. The verse following the verse cited here in MidrPM is significant: “The Eternal punished me severely, but did not hand me over to death” (Ps. 118:18). The citation of this Biblical verse suggests that Moses is not attempting to escape punishment, after all, he is willing to serve Joshua and forgo his position as leader; he is only trying to avoid death. Though it does not appear to fit the context of MidrPM, DeutR 11:5 suggests another

etc. (Ps. 118:17). The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, שאמות, לא אמות כי אחיה
 וגו', א"ל הקב"ה רב לך עד. "Let it suffice (Deut. 3:26).¹⁵ You have done enough until now.
 You will come this far and no further. *Call upon Joshua and I* פה תבוא ולא תוסיף, קרא
will give him instructions (Deut. 31:14)."¹⁶ את יהושע ואצוונו,

Moses replied, "Master of the Universe, why should I die? If אמר לפניו רבש"ע מפני מה
 it's because of Joshua's honor; let him rule and I will leave." אני מת? אם בשביל כבודו
 של יהושע יכנס יהושע
 לשררה ואני אצא.

possibility is that Moses is concerned that without him, there will not be enough praise of God on Earth.

15. *Let it suffice* This is the first of four times MidrPM references this quote from Deut. 3:26. In the Biblical context, God is "wrathful" with Moses when he requests to enter the Land of Israel and God says to him, "Enough! Never speak to Me of this matter again."

16. *Call upon Joshua and I will give him instructions* It should be noted here, that God, The Divine Self, prefers to teach Joshua. This is in contrast to other traditions (e.g. PA 1:1) which depict Moses as the one who begins the chain of oral tradition by first passing it to Joshua.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, “Will you treat him as he would treat you?” Moses replied, “Yes.”¹⁷ א"ל הקב"ה ותעשה לו כמו שהיה עושה לך? א"ל הן.

3.2 MOSES IS WILLING TO SERVE JOSHUA

Immediately, Moses agreed and went to get Joshua and called him “My teacher, Joshua.” And Joshua became terrified and said [to Moses,] “You call me My teacher?!” Moses, our teacher, peace be upon him, said to Joshua, “Wouldn’t you rather I live and not die? Joshua said to him, “Yes.” [Moses] said to him, “And would it not be better for you that I not [die] in this way? If anything is hard for you, I will [be able to] teach you. If so, it must be acceptable to you that I should live and do for you what you did for me.”¹⁸ מיד הסכים משה והלך אחר יהושע וקרא לו רבי יהושע, נתיירא יהושע מאד וא"ל ולי אתה קורא רבי! א"ל מרע"ה ליהושע רוצה אתה שאחיה ולא אמות? א"ל הן, א"ל ולא טוב לך שלא אמות באופן כזה? ואם יקשה בעיניך שום דבר אני מלמדך, אבל קבל עליך שאחיה ואעשה לך כמו שהיית עושה לי. א"ל יהושע למרע"ה כל

17. Will you treat him, as he would treat you God’s question to Moses points out God’s worry that perhaps Moses will not be able to be subordinate to Joshua – he might become jealous of Joshua (see CJ 15:6). Perhaps this is also why God feels Moses is incapable of teaching Joshua himself; maybe in an effort to demonstrate that his life is of critical importance, Moses would sabotage his teaching of Joshua.

18. Do for you what you did for me Joshua served Moses for all the years in the desert. Here, Moses suggests that he and Joshua switch roles – Joshua will become the leader and Moses, the servant. However, the role reversal is not quite comparable because Moses

be upon him, “All that you will declare to me, I will accept [and do], in order that I will see your face.¹⁹ And Moses, our teacher, peace be upon him, began to show all the honor to Joshua, that [Joshua] showed him. When they entered the tent of meeting, the pillar of cloud came down, as it is written, *The Eternal appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud* (Deut. 31:15), and it separated Joshua and Moses, Joshua was inside and Moses was outside.²⁰ When

appears to see his role as servant (“I will [be able to] teach you”) as an advisor, not purely as a servant. He is reluctant to give up his position as “The Teacher.” In BT Sot 8a he is punished for this.

19. *I will see your face* Rabbinically this biblical phrase – seeing someone’s face – is tantamount to embracing the person’s core being. For example, Jacob’s comment to Esau in Gen. 33:10, “No, I pray you; if you would do me this favor, accept from me this gift; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably.”

20. *Joshua was inside and Moses was outside* The Torah tells us that God tells Moses to call Joshua and appear in the Tent of Meeting; there God appears in a pillar of cloud. MidrPM creatively interprets the verse from Deut. 31:15 to answer the question, “Why is the pillar at the entrance of the tent?” MidrPM’s interpretation explains that the pillar of cloud blocked Moses from entering the tent, suggesting that God rejects Moses’

[Moses] saw this, he said, *[Better] one hundred deaths* כִּיּוֹן שֶׁרָאָה כֵּךְ
than a single envy (DeutR VY 9).²¹ ואמר מאה מיתות ולא קנאה אחת.

3.3 MOSES COMPARES HIMSELF TO OTHER BIBLICAL HEROES

Moses began to implore God²² and said before God, “Master הִתְחִיל מֹשֶׁה לְתַבּוֹעַ אוֹתוֹ בְּפִי
 of the Universe, what sin have I committed that I should ואמר לפניו רבש"ע מה חטא

proposition to serve Joshua. God has determined that Joshua will become the leader and together they (God and Joshua) will lead the Israelite people.

21. *[Better] one hundred deaths than a single envy* At the moment that God separates Moses from Joshua and leaves him outside the Tent of Meeting (the place he has had access to since it was built), Moses realizes that in fact he cannot truly serve Joshua. It would be impossible for Moses to serve and not become jealous of Joshua's role as leader. DeutR 9:9 explains that Moses is forced to ask Joshua what God revealed to him. Joshua would not reveal the secret to Moses. At that moment Moses realizes that he would rather die than be jealous.

22. *Moses began to implore God* After Moses' realization that he would become jealous of Joshua if he served as Joshua's servant, he changes tactics. Moses tries to appeal to God's reason, explaining that he has done nothing wrong to deserve death. This entire section compares Moses to Adam and to the three patriarchs. This thematic structure of moving from Adam to Moses is common in the midrash. Sometimes its purpose is to praise

die?!²³ The Holy One, Blessed be He, said, “For the sin of א"ל הקב"ה בידי כדי שאמות? א"ל הקב"ה
 Adam,” as it is written, *Now that man has become like one of* הן, מחטאו של אדם הראשון
us (Gen. 3:22).²⁴ Therefore, you will die. Moses responded, שכתוב בו הן האדם היה כאחד
 “Master of the Universe, was it in vain that my feet trod on א"ל ממנו לפיכך אתה מת.

God through the generations (TY 34). However, in many other cases, the structure is used as an attempt to show how Moses is a greater hero than all the ones who came before him (DeutR 11:3, MidTan VE 6, and LotJN 888).

23. *What sin have I committed that I should die* Moses does not understand why he must die. Another tradition (ARNB 25) explains that Moses accepts his punishment of not entering the Land of Israel for striking the rock, but he does not understand what sin he committed, perhaps unknowingly, that he should be punished by death. According to this tradition, God swears to Moses that he is only dying because of the decree against Adam – in other words, Moses must die because he is human not God.

24. *Now that man has become like one of us* God tells Moses that he must die, not for any sin he committed, but because of the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden – eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (see parallel tradition in SD 323 which stresses that all the descendants of Adam will die). More interesting is that MidrPM quotes this particular part of the verse from Genesis – the sin is not “eating” of the tree, but “becoming” like God. This reflects section one where MidrPM points out that the boundaries between God and Moses have been blurred. The point here is that God is supreme; none, not even Moses can become like God.

the clouds and for nothing did I run before your children like רבש"ע לשוא דשו רגלי
 a horse?"²⁵ [God] said to him, "I already charged Adam with בערפל ולשוא רצתי לפני בניך
 death." [Moses] replied, "Master of the Universe, You gave כסוס? א"ל כבר קנסתי מיתה
 the The First Man an easy commandment and he transgressed על אדם. א"ל רבש"ע אדם
 it²⁶, but I have not transgressed. [God] said to him, "Behold, הראשון מצוה קלה צוית אותו
 Abraham sanctified My Name in the world and he died. ועבר עליה ואני לא עברתי.
 [Moses] said to [God], *Ishmael issued from him etc.*²⁷ [God] א"ל הרי אברהם קדש שמי
 responded, "Behold, Isaac, his son, stretched out his neck on בעולם ומת, א"ל יצא ממנו

25. *run before your children like a horse* The expression "running like a horse" refers to Moses' leadership of the Israelite people while laboring like a horse who pulls a heavy load behind him. Here, Moses wonders if he labored for nothing.

26. *Easy commandment and he transgressed it* See BT Shab 55b.

27. *Ishmael issued from him* Though MidrPM makes it appear like this is a quote from the Bible, this verse appears nowhere in Scripture in this exact form. For MidrPM, Ishmael represents the Muslim world which in this section is the birth of whom is portrayed as a sin committed by Abraham worthy of death. See MidTan Huk 16 which reads: "whose descendants arouse your anger, as it said: "The tents of robbers prosper" (Job 12:6). See also DeutR 11:3. Though not exactly the same, it is possible that this verse refers to Jer. 41:6, יִצְחָק בֶּן-יִשְׁמָעֵאל. This section of the book of Jeremiah portrays a different Ishmael (though presumably a descendant of Abraham's Ishmael) leading a Babylonian insurrection against Judah and Gedaliah.

the alter. Moses replied, *Esau issued from him*.²⁸ [God] said ישמעאל וכו'. א"ל הרי יצחק
 to him, "Behold, Jacob, from whom issued the twelve tribes בנו שפשט צוארו ע"ג המזבח,
 and they didn't anger Me." [Moses] said to [God], "[He] א"ל יצא ממנו עשו וכו'. א"ל
 didn't ascend to the firmament²⁹ and [his] feet did not tread הרי יעקב שיצאו ממנו י"ב
 on the clouds, and You didn't speak with him face to face, שבטים ולא הכעיסוני, א"ל לא
 and [he] didn't receive Torah from your hand. The Holy One, עלה לרקיע ולא דשו רגליו
 בערפל ולא דברת עמו פנים אל
 פנים ולא קבל התורה מידך,

28. *Esau issued from him* Another quotation that MidrPM wants to make look like it is from Scripture, though it is not. To the rabbis, Esau represents Christianity, Rome and the ultimate enemies of Israel. The comparison between Isaac and Esau here is interesting though. God praises Isaac for his willingness to sacrifice himself on the alter. See, for example, DeutR 55:4. But, Moses criticizes him for giving birth to Esau, the progenitor of the enemy.

29. *[He] didn't ascend to the firmament* In a last effort, Moses attempts to thwart God's comparison to Jacob. Jacob, like Moses, was the leader of the twelve tribes of Israel. God asserts that unlike the twelve tribes whom Moses lead through the desert, the twelve tribes of Jacob never angered God. However, Moses retorts that Jacob (possibly referring to Jacob's dream of the staircase ascending to heaven) never actually saw God face to face or ascended to the firmament as Moses did to receive the Ten Commandments.

Blessed be He, said to [Moses], “Let it suffice you.³⁰ Speak א"ל הקב"ה רב לך אל תוסף
no more to me of this matter.” דבר אלי עוד בדבר הזה.

3.4 MOSES PLEADS: PEOPLE MIGHT SPEAK ILL OF HIM

[Moses] Said to [God], “Master of the Universe, perhaps אמר לפניו רבש"ע שמא יאמרו
Israel will say,³¹ “Had it not been for the evil things found in ישראל אלולי מצא במשה
Moses, He would not have removed him from the world.” דברים רעים לא היה מסלקו מן
[God] said to him, “I already wrote in My Torah, *Never* העולם, א"ל כבר כתבתי
again did there arise a prophet like Moses (Deut. 34:10). בתורתי ולא קם נביא עוד
[Moses] replied, “Perhaps they will say that in my youth I בישראל כמשה, א"ל שמא
did Your will, but in my old age I did not do Your will.” יאמרו בקטנותי עשיתי רצונך
ובזקנותי לא עשיתי רצונך, א"ל

30. *Let it suffice you.* Though other traditions (e.g. DeutR 11:3) appear to view Moses as greater than the heroes who come before him, MidrPM does not take that stance. In fact, God seems to be left aggravated with Moses’ attempt to prove that he is greater than his predecessors.

31. *perhaps Israel will say* God does not accept that Moses is greater than all his predecessors, so Moses tries another tactic – an appeal to God for his own positive image. This is a familiar tactic used by Moses – to appeal to God’s own “self-image” to persuade God to not kill the Israelites when they rebelled after the false report from the spies (Num. 13:13ff).

[God] said to him, "I already wrote, *Because you failed to* כבר כתבתי על אשר לא קדשתם
sanctify Me (Deut. 32:51).³² אותי.

[Moses] said to God, "Master of the Universe, let me enter א"ל רבש"ע אכנס לא"י ואחיה
into the Land of Israel and live there two to three years, and שם שתי שנים או שלש ואמות,
then die." [God] said to him, "It is My decree, that you are א"ל גזרה היא מלפני שלא תכנס
not to enter there." [Moses] said to [God], "If I may not enter לשם. א"ל אם לא אכנס בחיי
in my life, let me enter when I die?"³³ [God] responded, אכנס במותי, א"ל לאו.
"No."

32. *Because you failed to sanctify Me* God rejects the notion that the people will think ill of Moses, or make up stories that subvert his greatness. God makes it abundantly clear that Moses will die because Moses struck the rock at Meribath-kadesh. This tradition in numerous sources, e.g., NumR 19:12, LevR 31:14, and MidrTan Huk 16.

33. *If I may not enter in my life, let me enter when I die?* As mentioned above, Moses seems confused as to his punishment for striking the rock. Is it that he should not enter the Land of Israel? Or, that he should die? In fact, it appears that our tradition is just as confused. Here MidrPM (and MidrTan VE 6) acknowledge this confusion and seeming lack of logic on the part of God. However, the confusion will be cleared up in the following section.

3.5 MOSES' SINS

[Moses] said to God, “Master of the Universe, “Why [do you
 have] all this anger towards me?” [God] said to him, “Because
you didn't sanctify Me (ibid.).” Moses, our teacher, peace be
 upon him, said to [God], “It is written, *God does all these*
things (Job 33:29), and You act towards all your creatures
 with the quality of compassion [forgiving them for their sins]
 one time or two or three, while as for me, I only have one sin
 and You will not pardon me.

א"ל רבש"ע כל הכעס הזה
 עלי למה? אמר לו על אשר
 לא קדשתם אותי. א"ל מרע"ה
 כתיב כל אלה יפעל אל וכו'
 ואתה מתנהג עם בריותך
 במדת רחמים פעם אחת
 ושתיים ושלש, ואני עון אחד
 יש לי ואין אתה מכפר לי,

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to [Moses], “Moses, you
 have committed six sins and I didn't reproach you for a single
 one of them.³⁴ The very first was when you said to Me, *Send*,

א"ל הקב"ה משה שש עונות
 בידך ולא גליתי לך שום אחד
 מהם: בתחלה אמרת לי שלח

34. *Moses, you have committed six sins* God finally explains that Moses has not committed one sin, but six: 1) When God first appeared to Moses in the Burning Bush and Moses asked God to send someone else in his stead to Pharaoh (Ex. 4:13). 2) When Moses talks back to God, claiming his coming to Pharaoh caused more harm than good (Ex. 5:23). 3) In his argument about the deaths of Dathan and Abiram, Moses speaks the words “God did not send me” (Num. 16:29). 4) MidPss 90 explains that Num. 16:30 casts doubt on the adequacy of God's measure of justice. 5) When Moses chastises Israel and strikes the rock at Meribah (Num. 20:10). 6) Moses brands all of Israel as sinners even after the generation of slavery had ended (Num. 32:14).

I pray, someone else as your agent (Ex. 4:13). Second [was], נא ביד תשלח, שנית ומאז
Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, באתי אל פרעה לדבר בשמך
[Pharaoh] has dealt worse with this people (Ex. 5:23). Third, הרע לעם הזה, שלישי לא
It was not The Eternal who sent me (Num. 16:29). Fourth, *If* לא ה' שלחני, רביעית ואם
The Eternal brings about something unheard-of (Num. בריאה יברא ה', חמישית
16:30). Fifth, *Listen you rebels* (Num. 20:10). Sixth, *And now* שמעו נא המורים, ששית
you, a breed of sinful men, have rejected your fathers (Num. והנה קמתם תחת אבותיכם
32:14). Were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob sinners, would you תרבות אנשים חטאים,
talk to their children in this way?³⁵ אברהם יצחק ויעקב חטאים
היו שאמרת לבניהם כך?

Moses said [to God], “Master of the Universe, from You I אמר לפניו רבש"ע ממך
learned when You said: *Remove the fire pans of those who* למדתי שאמרת את מחתות
have sinned at the cost of their lives (Num. 17:3).³⁶ [God] said החטאים האלה בנפשותם,

35. *that you would talk to their children in this way* In response to the traditions cited above claiming the Moses was greater than his predecessors, MidrPM (and MidTan VE 6) criticize Moses not only for chastising Israel, but for thinking that he is better than Israel, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the very patriarchs Moses deems as greater sinners than he.

36. *Remove the fire pans* The Biblical reference here is to the story of the rebellion of Korah. In the aftermath of the rebellion, God instructs Moses to remove the fire pans of the sinners and place them on the altar as a warning for all of Israel. Similarly, Moses explains

to [Moses], "I didn't mention their fathers."³⁷ [Moses] said to א"ל אני לא הזכרתי אבותם,
 [God], "Master of the Universe, how many times did Israel sin א"ל רבש"ע כמה פעמים
 and I prayed and implored for Your mercy and You forgave חטאו ישראל והתחננתי
 them. But me You will not forgive!" [God] said to [Moses], והתפללתי עליהם לפניך
 "The decree against the public is different than the decree ומחלת להם ולי לא תמחול,
 against the individual."³⁸ And further, until today [your] fate א"ל אין דומה גזירת צבור
 was in your power."³⁹ Immediately [Moses] began to pray and לגזירת יחיד, ועוד עד היום
 היתה השעה מסורה בידך.
 מיד התחיל לדבר תפלות

here, that he learned from God's own instruction to rebuke the sins of the wicked, as a warning for all Israel.

37. *I didn't mention their fathers* Perhaps invoking the fourth commandment, God explains that chastising Israel and their fathers is too much. Ginzberg explains, "Moses was commanded by God to ask the fathers of Israel for pardon for having offended them" (LotJN 889).

38 *decree against the public ... the decree against the individual* The tradition here in MidrPM (also in MidTan VE 6) reflects the notion that the individual is judged harsher than the entire community.

39. *[your] fate was in your power* Moses had the opportunity to ask for repentance for his sins, but he never did. His fate was in his power until the decree of his death was signed.

offer supplications, and of him, Solomon said, *The poor man* ותחנונים, ועליו אמר שלמה
speaks beseechingly (Prov. 18:23).⁴⁰ תחנונים ידבר רש.

4 PARABLE: MOSES' LOSS OF POWER

They offered a parable, this is likened to a sage who used to משלו משל למה"ד לחכם [עמוד
 teach the king's son and all the courtiers were afraid of him שהיה מלמד לבנו של מלך 363
 (the sage).⁴¹ And not only the children of the courtiers, but והיו כל בני פלטרין של מלך

40. *The poor man speaks beseechingly* The second half of this verse from Proverbs reads, "The rich man's answer is harsh." DeutR 2:4 explains that the poor man is Moses and the richest Being in the world is God, who continuously tells Moses, "Let it suffice you." The point here is that Moses finally seems to understand his fate; that he might have accomplished great feats and received great honors, but his fate is no different than any other man. Perhaps, though he believed he was "rich" – better than other men, now he sees that really he is "poor," only God is "rich" and in the end, the best one can do is pray. See parallel in MidrTan VE 6.

41. *They offered a parable* MidrPM explains that in this parable Moses is both the sage and the king's son, because when Moses dies he is unable to command the heavens and earth (like the sage was able to command all the courtiers when the king's son was alive). But, a better interpretation of the parable might suggest that the king's son is really Israel – those who began the journey with Moses. When they died, like the king's son, Moses lost all of his power. A similar parable is offered in DeutR 2:3 comparing Moses to a king's

also everyone was afraid of him! They would do all that he יראים ממנו, ולא בני פלטרין
 wanted because he was the tutor of the king's son. Shortly בלבד אלא גם כל העולם היו
 afterwards, the king's son died. Because he died, the tutor יראים ממנו והיו עושים כל
 lost all of the bounties that he received from the courtiers. רצונו על שהיה מלמד לבנו של
 He started to go begging. In the days when the king's son מלך, לאחר זמן מועט מת בנו
 was alive, [the sage] had all in his command. Once [the של מלך כיון שמת אבד רבו כל
 prince] died, he lost it all. So it was for Moses, our teacher, הטובות שהיו לו מבני פלטרין
 peace be upon him. All the time that he was alive the והתחיל להחזיר על הפתחים,
 heavens and earth were in his command, as it says, *You went באותן הימים שהיה בנו של מלך*
up to the heights, having taken captives, having received חי היה הכל ברשותו של חכם
tribute from men (Ps. 68:19). [You] split the sea, brought out כיון שמת אבד הכל. כך מרע"ה
 water from the rock, brought down the manna, and only you כל זמן שהיה חי היה הכל
 could say, "*Rise up God*" (Num. 10:35), "*Return God*" ברשותו עליונים ותחתונים
 (Num. 10:36). And more, *Unless You go in the lead, don't שנאמר עלית למרום שבית שבי*
make us leave this place (Ex. 33:15). [However], when the לקחת מתנות באדם, בקע הים,
 time arrived for [Moses] to depart [from this world], he הוציא מים מן הסלע, הוריד
 would search for someone one who would ask for המן, ולא עוד אלא שהיה אומר
 קומה ה' שובה ה', ועוד אם אין

favorite whose time as the favorite had past. Moses had the power to perform God-like wonders, even make demands of God, but when it was time for Moses to die (perhaps with the rest of older generation), Moses lost all his power. For more on the nature and function of the *mashal*, parable, in Rabbinic Literature, see David Stern's Parables in Midrash.

compassion [for him].⁴² Behold, this is what is meant by, פניך הולכים אל תעלנו מזה. כיון שהגיע זמנו ליפטר היה מחזיר למי שיבקש עליו רחמים, הוי תחנונים ידבר רש, וכתוב לחזקתו, ועת לכל חפץ תחת השמים, עת היתה למשה לירד למצרים ליטול גאולה ולגאול

42. *he would search* This is a nice play on the word “poor” in the quote from Prov. 18:23. The parable depicts the once powerful sage going door to door begging, just as Moses became poor in the hour of his death and had to go around to all of creation begging them to beseech God on his behalf. MidrPM only gives us one small piece of this tradition, but other texts (e.g. MidrTan VE 6 and LotJ pg. 431ff) explain that Moses beseeches the heaven and earth, the sun and moon, the stars and planets, the mountains and hills, Mount Sinai, the rivers and deserts, and the Great Sea.

43. *A season is set for everything* A similar idea is put forth in DeutR 2:3. The notion is that there was a time for Moses to rule and be powerful, and conversely, there was a time for Moses to lose his power, become “poor,” and have to beseech God. The alternative tradition uses Dan. 2:21 which nicely places God in the seat of power explaining that all wisdom and power belong to God. As noted above, MidrPM reinforces the idea that although Moses appears to be godlike, the true power of everything rests in the hands of the One God.

redeem Israel⁴⁴, as it says, *Moreover, that man Moses was* את ישראל שנאמר גם האיש
much esteemed in the land of Egypt (Ex. 11:3). And it was a משה גדול מאד בכל ארץ
time for him to beseech [God], as it is said, *I pleaded etc.*, מצרים, ועת היתה לו להפיל
saying, The Eternal is God, [You who let Your servant see תחנה שנאמר ואתחנן וגו' בעת
the first works of Your greatness] etc. (Deut. 3:23-24). ההיא לאמר ה' אלהים וגו'

5 MOSES AND GOD DISCUSS MOSES' DEATH

5.1 MOSES PRAISES GOD

Why did Moses mention these two names [of God's]?⁴⁵ It שתי שמות הללו למה הזכירן
teaches that Moses said, "With these two names, [the משה? מלמד שאמר משה בשני
Eternal, God] The Holy One, Blessed be He, created His שמות הללו ברא הקב"ה את
world and humans with justice and mercy, as it says, *The עולמו ואת האדם בדין וברחמים,*
שנאמר וייצר ה' אלהים את
האדם, ומנין ששני שמות הללו

44. *It was time* These verses from Ex. 11:3 and Deut. 3:23-24 reflect the polarity of Ecc. 3:1. In life, there is a time for both highs and lows: a time for Moses to be great and esteemed, and a time for him to be lowly and poor.

45. *two names [of God's]* This refers to the end of the previous section (and the beginning of Deut. 3:24) in which Moses begins his plea with, אֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה, "The Eternal, God." MidrPM asks the question, "Why does Moses use these names for God which represent both justice and mercy, to begin his plea?"

Eternal, God formed man (Gen. 2:7).⁴⁶ Whence do we learn that these the two names stand for justice and mercy? It says, *The Eternal! The Eternal! A God merciful and gracious etc.* (Ex. 34:6).⁴⁷ Behold, this indicates mercy and justice. Relating to [these attributes, Moses] said, *The Eternal, our God; You began to show* (Deut. 3:24)⁴⁸ me

הם רחמים ודין שנאמר ה' ה' אל רחום וחנון וגו' הרי כאן רחמים ודין, לזה אמר ה' אלהים אתה החלות להראות לי גבורתך בסנה ועתה בזקנותי אני מבקש רחמים על עמך צאן מרעיתך שתסלה

46. *The Eternal, God formed man* This verse from Gen. 2:7 repeats the use of the phrase, “The Eternal, God.” MidrPM uses this first parallel occurrence to show that calling God by these two names relates to the creation of man.

47. *The Eternal! The Eternal!* MidrPM cites the famous verse from Ex. 34:6 listing God’s thirteen attributes (the same attributes Jews recite on the High Holy days) as evidence that when “The Eternal, our God” is referenced, it also indicates God’s mercy and justice. Interestingly, in this list of attributes, the word “justice” does not appear. But, the notion of God’s justice does appear at the end of Ex. 34:7 (ironically, the part of the verse Jews do not read on the High Holy Days), “God does not forgive all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations.”

48. *You began to show* DeutR 2:8 uses this verse as basis for Moses’ plea to God. It plays on the word “began” to show that God was the initiator; similar to the argument Moses uses to defend his rebuking of the Israelite people, claiming that he learned it from God. However, here, MidrPM adds a request for God to act mercifully towards the people.

Your greatness in the [burning] bush, and now in my old age I ask mercy on Your people, the flock of Your pasture, that You will forgive and pardon them. Please do not be like a king of flesh and blood.⁴⁹ When a human king has a servant, he loves him when he is young and strong, but hates him when he grows old. But You, *do not cast me off in old age etc.* (Ps. 71:9).⁵⁰ *Your greatness* (Deut. 3:24) is

ותכפר להם, בבקשה ממך אל
 תהיה כמלך בשר ודם, מלך ב"ו
 כשיהיה לו עבד בעודו בחור והוא
 גבור הוא אוהבו וכשיזקין הוא
 שונאו, אבל אתה אל תשליכני
 לעת זקנה וגו', את גדלך אלו
 עשרת הדברות, ואת ידך החזקה
 אלו עשר מכות, אשר מי אל
 בשמים ובארץ, אתה בראת הכל
 ובידך להמית ולהחיות, אשר

This addition is a significantly different stance which MidrPM draws from DeutR 2:8. Here, Moses invokes the needs of the people Israel to persuade God to let him live. Conversely, Moses' approach in DeutR 2:8 focuses on Moses' defensive plea, claiming that his "sins" were learned from God's actions.

49. *king of flesh and blood* This is a typical phrase introducing a Rabbinic parable. God is compared to a human king who does not act with mercy and compassion, but God, of course, is greater than a human king and does not act in the same way.

50. *do not cast me off* The parable Moses tells is appropriate, because as a young man he was strong, able to serve God, and lead the Israelite people. But he is worried that perhaps his old age causes God to sentence him to death. He beseeches God not to be like a human king, but to show him mercy and compassion.

the Ten Commandments;⁵¹ and *Your mighty hand* (ibid.) is מעשה כמעשיך וכגבורותיך
 the Ten Plagues.⁵² For *[no] god in heaven or on earth [can לעתיד לבא. ולמה אמר משה*
equal you] (ibid.) You created everything, and it is in Your כ"כ, אלא משה היה סבור שאם
 hand to bring death and restore life. *Who can do according* ישראל ירצו לעשות שום עון אינו
to Your works and Your might (ibid.) in the future? And מניחם וזה בשמים ובארץ, ר"ל
 why did Moses say all this? Because Moses reasoned that אל אחד ואין זולתו, ולא עוד אלא
 if Israel wanted to commit any evil,⁵³ he would not allow שאודיע הוד כבודך לדורות
 them. And this is what is meant by: *heavens and earth* שיבואו ואומר להם שעל ידי
 בקעת הים ונתת התורה לישראל
 והמטרת להם לחם מן השמים

51. the Ten Commandments God is portrayed as merciful and just, and God's works underscore those attributes. Here, God's greatness is God's mercy in giving the Ten Commandments to the Israelites.

52. the Ten Plagues Just as God is merciful in giving the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, God also shows God's strength and justice through God's "mighty hand" – bringing the Ten Plagues upon Egypt.

53. wanted to commit any evil In Moses' plea to God, he continues to focus on Israel's needs rather than on own. MidrPM uses Deut. 3:24 to show that Moses is not only praising God, lest one think that his praise is self-serving, but he is beseeching God because he has Israel's interest at heart. Moses is concerned that Israel will sin after his death, which is alluded to in Deut. 31:29. See also SN 138 regarding Moses' concern for Israel.

(ibid.). This means, there is One God,⁵⁴ and there is none ארבעים שנה והעלית מים מן
beside Him. [This is what Moses thought,] I will proclaim הבאר והוצאת להם מים מן
to the future generations Your glory and honor, and tell הסלע, ועכשיו אם טוב בעיניך לא
them that by my hand did You part the sea, and You gave אמות כי אחיה ואספר מעשי יה,
the Torah to Israel, and You caused bread from the heaven
to rain down on them for 40 years, and You raised water
from the well, and You brought forth water from the rock.
And now if it pleases You, I shall not die but live and
recount the works of God.⁵⁵

54. *there is One God* Meaning there is one God for all of heaven and earth. If God had any doubt about how Moses viewed himself (as a man or god), here Moses proclaims the “oneness” of God.

55. *live and recount* Moses explains that he wishes to live, not for himself, but so that there will be a person to tell of all of God’s miraculous deeds. Moses is compared to the angels whose function is to praise God.

5.2 GOD'S WORRY: ISRAEL WILL SIN BECAUSE OF MOSES

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to [Moses], "Enough for א"ל הקב"ה די לך, אם תשאר חי
 you! If you remain alive, [Israel] will err by you, and make יטעו בך ויעשו אותך אלוה
 you into a god and worship you."⁵⁶ Moses said to [God], ויעבדוך, אמר לפניו רבש"ע
 "Master of the Universe, "You already tested me⁵⁷ in the כבר בדקת אותי בעשיית העגל
 making of the calf, and I destroyed it, and now I should die?" ובטלתי אותו ועכשיו אמות?

56. *worship you* Since Moses blurs the line between man and god, God understands that Israel might have a problem differentiating between Moses and God. This is the reason why Moses is left out of the Passover Haggadah because he is the one who performs most of the miracles in the Exodus. He is the one who leads Israel out of Egypt and through the desert. Israel also has a history of worshipping idols and might prefer a god they can see to a God they cannot.

57. *tested me* Moses acknowledges Israel's desire to worship a god which they can see over God. But, Moses tries to assuage God's worry by explaining that the matter of the Golden Calf was a test for Moses – to see if he would destroy it or use it as a god. Moses passed the test to prove God's eternal "Oneness."

5.3 GOD AND MOSES ARGUE: TO WHOM IS MOSES' EQUAL?

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to [Moses], “Whose son are you? [Moses] said to [God], “The son of Amram.”⁵⁸ [God] said to [Moses], “And whose son is Amram?” [Moses] said to [God], “The son of Itzhar.”⁵⁹ [God replied], “And whose son is Itzhar?” [Moses] said to [God], “The son of Kohat.” [God replied], “And whose son is Kohat?” [Moses] said to [God], “The son of Levi.” [God] said to [Moses], “And from whom do they all descend?” [Moses] said to [God], “From the First Man.” [God] said to him, “Have any of them remained alive?”⁶⁰ [Moses] said to [God], “They all died.” The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, “And you want to live on?!” [Moses] said to [God], “Master of the Universe, Adam stole [the forbidden fruit], and ate [it] against Your will and You punished him with death. But, I

א"ל הקב"ה משה בן מי אתה? א"ל בן עמרם, א"ל ועמרם בן מי הוא א"ל בן יצהר, ויצהר בן מי הוא א"ל בן קהת, וקהת בן מי הוא א"ל בן לוי, א"ל וכולם ממי יצאו א"ל מן אדה"ר, א"ל נשאר מהם שום אדם חי? א"ל כולם מתו, א"ל הקב"ה ואתה רוצה לחיות? א"ל רבש"ע אדה"ר גנב ואכל מה שלא רצית וקנסת עליו מיתה ואני גנבתי כלום לפניך? וכבר כתבת עלי עבדי משה בכל ביתי נאמן הוא, א"ל הקב"ה למשה

58. son of Amram Referenced in Ex. 6:20, Amram is described as the father of Moses and Aaron. Amram himself lived 137 years.

59. son of Itzhar This seems to be an error in the text. Ex. 6:18 tells us that Itzhar is Amram's brother and Kohat is their father.

60. remained alive God wants to point out that Moses is a human and not a god. All men die and therefore Moses must also die.

stole nothing from you. And You already wrote about me, כלום אתה צדיק מאדה"ר
My servant Moses; he is trusted in all my house (Num. ודורו? א"ל כן, אדה"ר וחוה
 12:7).⁶¹ The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses, “Are פיתה אותם נחש ואני החייתי
 you more righteous than the First Man and his generation?” מתים בנחש,
 [Moses] said to [God], “Yes. Adam and Eve were tempted
 by the serpent, but I gave life to the dead through a serpent.”⁶²

61. *trusted in all my house* Literally, Moses wants to prove that unlike Adam, he can be trusted by God and will not steal from “God’s garden” like Adam stole the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil which made him more like a god. Moses wants to show God that unlike Adam, he has no desire to be like God. However, the cited verse from Num. 12:7ff explains that unlike other prophets, who God speaks to in dreams and visions, God speaks directly to Moses – thus elevating his status above all other prophets. Additionally, another tradition (MidrPss 90) uses this verse while explaining how Moses is like “man” and “god” – explaining that Moses is the Master of God’s Palace. The message here then is complicated, Moses thinks he is proving to God that he doesn’t want to be like God, but in reality Moses must die because he has become too god-like!

62. *through a serpent* This refers to the story from Num. 21:4ff where the Israelites complain about their journey in the wilderness and God sends serpents which bite and kill many Israelites. Moses petitions God on behalf of the people. God instructs Moses to make a copper serpent and mount it on a standard; anyone who was bitten would look at the copper serpent and recover.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, “Are you greater א"ל הקב"ה כלום אתה גדול
 than Noah and his generation?” [Moses] said to [God], “Yes. מנה ודורו? א"ל כן, נח הבאת
 You brought on Noah and his generation the waters of the עליו ועל דורו מי המבול ונח
 flood, but Noah didn't ask mercy for his generation. But I לא בקש רחמים על דורו ואני
 said, *Now, if You will forgive their sins, [well and good]; but* אמרתי ועתה אם תשא חטאתם
if not, erase me from the book which You have written (Ex ואם אין מחני נא מספרך אשר
 32:32).⁶³ כתבת.

[God] said to [Moses], “Are you greater than Abraham, א"ל כלום אתה גדול מאברהם
 whom I tested with ten trials?” [Moses] said to [God], שנסייתי אותו בעשרה נסיונות?
 “Ishmael issued from him, *Whose children will destroy Your* א"ל יצא ממנו ישמעאל
children.”⁶⁴ [God] said to him, “Are you greater than Isaac?” שיאבדו בניו את בניך וכו'.
 [Moses] said to [God], “From his loins issued he who would א"ל האתה גדול מיצחק? א"ל

63. *erase me* Moses points out that he, in contrast to Noah, was willing to die for his people; Noah did not offer himself up to prevent the destruction of the world. Interestingly, later in MidrPM, God uses this same citation to prove to Moses that he in fact desired to die.

64. *destroy Your children* This is a parallel concocted citation to the one found in Section 3.3, though here the reason for Ishmael's evil is given. As mentioned before, it is possible that this concocted citation is based on the story in Jer. 41:6. DeutR 9:4 and 11:3 have parallel examples of biblical figures who are very human!

destroy Your Temple,⁶⁵ and his sons will kill Your sons, Your
priests, and Your Levites.⁶⁶ The Holy One, Blessed be He,
said to [Moses], “Did I tell you that you should kill the
Egyptian?”⁶⁷ [Moses] said to [God], “You killed all the
Egyptian first born,⁶⁸ and I should die on account of one
Egyptian?!” The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to [Moses],
יצא מחלציו מי שיחריב את
ביתך ובניו יהרגו את בניך
כהניך ולויד, א"ל הקב"ה כלום
אמרתי לך שתהרוג את
המצרי? א"ל ואתה הרגת כל
בכורי מצרים ואני אמות
בשביל מצרי אחד? א"ל
הקב"ה ואתה דומה אלי ממית

65. *destroy Your Temple* This is another parallel concocted citation to the one found in Section 3.3 in an expanded form. It possibly refers to the Babylonian destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C.E., but it more likely refers to the Roman sack of the Temple in 70 C.E. which sent the Jews into exile for almost two thousand years.

66. *Your Levites* This section which compares Moses to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is parallel to Section 3.3. However, here Moses is only compared to Abraham and Isaac. This highlights the “negative” progeny of these patriarchs whose descendants kill Moses’ descents, the priests and Levites.

67. *kill the Egyptian* Reference to the story from Ex. 2:11ff where Moses kills an Egyptian taskmaster and flees to Midian for safety.

68. *the Egyptian first born* Reference to the final plague God brings upon Egypt causing Pharaoh to finally free the Israelite slaves (Ex. 12:29ff).

ומחיה? כלום אתה יכול יכול
 “Are you equal to Me?”⁶⁹ I bring death and restore to life. Can
 you revive the dead like me? להחיות כמוני,

5.4 GOD PRAISES MOSES

ולא תזכור כמה כבוד כבדתיך, And [do you] not recall how much honor I have given you?
 אמרת לי קומה ה' וקמתי, שובה You said to Me “*Rise up*” (Num. 10:35) and I rose up; [you
 ה' ושבתי, גם בשבילך שנית said] “*Return*” (Num. 10:36) and I returned.⁷⁰ Also for your
 מעשה שמים וארץ, שדרכן של sake I changed the works of heaven and earth. It is the way
 שמים להוריד טל ומטר וארץ of the heaven to send down dew and rain, and the for the
 להוציא לחם ואתה אמרת לי איני land to give forth bread. Yet, you said to me, “I don't want
 רוצה בזה אלא השמים יורידו it this [way], instead let the heaven send down the bread
 לחם והארץ תוציא מים, וכן
 עשיתי שנאמר הנני ממטיר לכם
 לחם מן השמים ואומר עלי באר

69. *Are you equal to Me?* Perhaps the central theme of this section is that Moses is not equal to God. Moses might be greater than all men, even the heroes of the Bible who precede him, but Moses is not equal to God. The boundary between man and God which MidrPM points out is that men die and God is eternal.

70. *and I returned* Both citations (Num. 10:35ff) refer to how Moses would command God when to lead Israel and when to stay put. Normally one would expect God to issue all the commands and never to be commanded by a human, but on occasion Moses did command God.

and the earth bring forth water.”⁷¹ And so I did, as it says, *I will rain down bread for you from the heaven* (Ex. 16:4). ענו לה. גם הייתי רוצה ליתן לך חיים ואמרת לי איני רוצה אלא אמות) מחני נא מספרך וגו' (גם, Num. 21:17). Also I wanted to prolong your life, but you said to me “I only want to die” (*if not, erase me etc.* (Ex. 32:32)).⁷² אמרת לי ואם בריאה יברא ה' ופצתה האדמה את פיה ואני מלאתי את דברייך ועשיתי חפצך שנאמר ותפתח הארץ את פיה ותבלע אותם. גם אמרתי זוכה לאלהים יחרם בלתי לה' לבדו, וכשחטאו ישראל בעגל בקשתי Also you said to me, *But if The Eternal brings about something unheard-of, so that the ground opens its mouth* (Num. 16:30) and I fulfilled your words and I did according to your wish,⁷³ as it says, *And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up* (Num. 16:32). And I also said,

71. *earth bring forth water* Not only can Moses command God, but Moses can control the natural order of things. God points out that for Moses God caused bread (manna) to “rain” down from the sky; and when the Israelites needed water, God told Moses to instruct Israel to sing to the earth in order that a well spring up from the earth.

72. *I only want to die* As mentioned above, God uses the citation to show Moses that, in fact, he wanted to die rather than live – God is only fulfilling his own wish!

73. *I did according to your wish* Not only has God been commanded by Moses and changed the way nature works for Moses, God also creates a-new for Moses. The reference here to Num. 16:30 refers to the pit which opens up to swallow Korah and his followers. MidrPM explains that this pit is a brand new creation that God created specifically at Moses' request.

Whoever sacrifices to a god other than The Eternal alone shall be utterly destroyed (Ex. 22:19). When Israel sinned with the [golden] calf, I meant to fulfil My words,⁷⁴ but you did not allow Me, and you said to Me, *Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people* (Num. 14:19), and *I pardoned according to your will* (Num. 14:20).⁷⁵ Moreover, the Torah is named after Me, as it says, *The teaching of The Eternal is perfect* (Ps. 19:8), but I named it after you, as it says, *Remember the Torah of My servant Moses* (Mal. 3:16).⁷⁶

להקים את דברי ולא הנחת אותי ואמרת לי סלח נא לעון העם הזה, וסלחתי כדברייך. ולא עוד אלא התורה נקראת על שמי שנאמר תורת ה' תמימה וקראתיה על שמך שנאמר זכרו תורת משה עבדי, ג"כ ישראל נקראו על שמי שנאמר כי לי בני ישראל עבדים עבדי הם, בני בכורי ישראל,

74. *fulfil My words* In the incident of the Golden Calf, God swore to destroy Israel. In the Bible and in MidrPM, swearing an oath is very powerful. God cannot let Moses enter the land because God cannot break a vow. However, God points out that Moses is so powerful that he made God break God's vow to destroy the people after the incident with the Golden Calf. Just as the citation from Ex. 23:23 is used by both God and Moses to prove their respective points, this incident is also used by both God (CJ 50:9) and Moses (YS VY 78) similarly. In another tradition (DeutR 2:8), Moses uses this incident to explain to God that there is precedent for God to break God's oath.

75. *according to your will* These citations refer to the Israelite rebellion in Num. 14:1ff. Unlike the episode with the Golden Calf where God breaks God's vow and doesn't kill all the people (only some of them), here God pardons the Israelite people at Moses' request. See also BT Ber 32a and ExR 44:2 in this regard.

3:22).⁷⁶ Also, the children of Israel are named after Me, as וקראתים על שמך שנאמר ויזכור
 it says, *For it is to Me that the Israelites are servants: they* ימי עולם משה עמו. ולא עוד אלא
are My servants (Lev. 25:55). *Israel is my first-born son* שדברתי עמך באמירה ובדיבור
 (Ex. 4:22). I called them after you, as it says, *Then he* שנאמר ויאמר ה' אל משה וידבר
remembered the ancient day, Moses and his people (Isa. ה' אל משה, אף אתה דברת עמי
 63:11).⁷⁷ Not only that, but I spoke with you by 'saying' באמירה ובדיבור שנאמר ויאמר

76. *Torah of My servant Moses* MidrPM uses the citations from Psalms and from Malachi – both verses attribute the Torah to different entities, Psalms to God and Malachi to Moses. Interestingly though, further illustrating the notion that the difference between Moses and God is that God gives and takes away life, is that these two citations emphasize God's and Moses' particular roles. In the verse from Psalms, we read, תורת יהוה תמימה, משיבת נפש, “The teaching of The Eternal is perfect, renewing life,” and from Malachi we read, זכרו תורת משה עבדי אשר צויתי אותי בחרב על-כל-ישראל תקים ומשפטים: “Be mindful of the Teaching of My servant Moses, whom I charged at Horeb with laws and rules for all Israel” (NJPS).” By using these two verses, MidrPM points out the differences between Moses and God – God controls all life and Moses conveys the law.

77. *Moses and his people* MidrPM plays with the ambiguity of the verse from Isaiah and wants to attribute the people of Israel to Moses to emphasize the honor God has given to Moses. However, in its original context, Isaiah merely wants his listener to remember the “days of Moses” or idiomatically “ancient days” (NJPS); the people are really still God's people.

and speaking', as it says, *The Eternal said to Moses and* , משה אל ה' וידבר משה אל ה',
The Eternal spoke to Moses. You, too, spoke to Me by אני אין לפני אכילה ושתיה
 'saying' and 'speaking',⁷⁸ as it says, *Moses spoke to The* ועשיתך כיוצא בי שנאמר ויהי
Eternal and Moses talked with The Eternal. There is neither שם עם ה' ארבעים יום וארבעים
 food nor water for Me and I made you like Me, as it says, לילה לחם לא אכל ומים לא שתה.
And he was there with The Eternal forty days and forty ג"כ אני אלהים ואתה אלהים
nights; he ate no bread and drank no water (Ex. 34:28).⁷⁹ שנאמר ראה נתתיך אלהים
 Furthermore, I am God and you are god, as it says, *See I* לפרעה, ג"כ אני יש לי נביאים
place you as a god to Pharaoh (Ex. 7:1). Also, I have ואתה יש לך נביא שנאמר ואהרן
 prophets and you have a prophet, as it says, *Your brother* אחיך יהיה נביאך. אתה אין בריה
Aaron shall be your prophet (ibid.). And just as no creature יכולה להסתכל כנגדך שנאמר

78. 'saying' and 'speaking' MidrPM is playing on ויאמר and וידבר, the two forms of speech in the Bible. The point is that Moses is unique because he and God spoke to each other in plain speech, "With [Moses] I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles" (Num. 12:8). The emphasis here is on the parallelism and the reciprocity of their relationship. See parallel in ExR 45:3.

79. ate no bread and drank no water While Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments from God he did not eat or drink for forty days. The point MidrPM wants to make is that a normal human would die under those conditions, but Moses is like God in that he does not need food or water to survive. Additionally, this further blurs the line between Moses and God (DeutR 11:4).

can look at you, as it says, *And they feared coming near him* (Ex. 34:30).⁸⁰ I said, *You will see My back; but My face must not be seen* (Ex. 33:23). And thus it is written, *And they gazed after Moses* (Ex. 33:8).⁸¹ With twenty-two letters I wrote⁸² the Torah and with all of them I honored you. I sent you to Pharaoh, and you brought Israel out of Egypt. I commanded you concerning the Shabbat and circumcision. I gave you the Ten Commandments, I covered you with the cloud, I gave you two stone tablets and you broke them. I made you unique in the world, and I

ויראו מגשת אליו וגו', אני אמרתי וראית את אחורי ופני לא יראו וכך כתיב והביטו אחרי משה. בכ"ב אותיות (כבדתי) [כתבתי] את התורה ובכולן כבדתיך, שלחתיך אל פרעה והוצאת את ישראל ממצרים, צויתך על השבת והמילה נתתי לך עשרת הדברות, כסיתך בענן, נתתי לך שני לוחות אבנים

80. *feared coming near him* This refers to the קרן עזר, “beams of light,” which radiated off Moses’ face when he descended from Mt. Sinai after receiving the Ten Commandments. These beams of light made him like a god when he was on earth, but while he was on Mt. Sinai, Moses was like a man because he was not made of fire like the angels (DeutR 11:4).

81. *after Moses* Here MidrPM is playing on the Hebrew word אחרי, “after.” Again, the point God is trying to make here is that Moses is similar to God. So just as Moses cannot see the face of God, only God’s “afterness” or God’s “back,” the same is true for the way the Israelites look at Moses. Because of his greatness, the Israelites can only see Moses’ “afterness.”

82. *I wrote* Some versions of the Hebrew text read כבדתי – “I honored.”

bestowed upon you My Torah, and I honored you more than the seventy elders.

ושברת אותם, עשיתך יחיד בעולם, [עמוד 364] הנחלתך תורתך, כבדתך משבעים זקנים.

5.5 MOSES PRAISES GOD

Moses continued thanking [God] for everything. He said to [God], "Master of the Universe, You have made me great and many benefits You have bestowed upon me that I cannot tell of one from among a thousand, and the whole world knows how You have made me great and honored me. Furthermore, the whole world knows that you are the One God, unique in Your world and there is none beside You and none like to You.⁸³ You created the upper and lower heavens; You are the first and the last, who can tell of Your mighty deeds. Yet, one thing that I ask of You, that I may cross the Jordan.

חזר משה והודה על הכל ואמר לפניו רבש"ע גדלתני והרבה טובות עשית לי שאיני יכול לספר אחת מני אלף, וכל העולם יודעים מה שגדלתני וכבדתני, ג"כ כל העולם יודעים שאתה ה' אחד יחיד בעולמך ואין זולתך ואין דומה לך, אתה בראת עליונים ותחתונים, אתה הוא ראשון ואתה הוא אחרון, ומי יוכל למלל גבורותיך, אלא דבר אחד אני מבקש ממך שאעבור את הירדן.

83. none like to You Since God has just finished explaining to Moses how similar Moses is to a god, Moses must now affirm God's "oneness" to prove to God that despite their similarities Moses does not view himself as a god. Moses is trying to ensure that God does not see him as a threat, so that God might let him live.

5.6 GOD AND MOSES BESEECH EACH OTHER

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses, “Moses! I א"ל הקב"ה למשה, משה! שתי
 swore two oaths, one that you should not enter the land שבועות נשבעתי אחת שלא תכנס
 and second, that I would not destroy Israel.⁸⁴ If you want לארץ ושנית שלא אכלה את ישראל,
 me to transgress my [first] oath [so that you] may enter אם רצונך שאעבור על השבועה
 the land, I also will have to transgress on my [other] oath ותכנס לארץ ג"כ אעבור על
 and destroy Israel.” [Moses] said to [God], “Master of השבועה ואכלה את ישראל. א"ל,
 the Universe, falsely You accuse me, seizing the rope at רבש"ע בעלילה אתה בא עלי לתפוס
 both ends.⁸⁵ Let Moses and a thousand like him perish so חבל בשני ראשיו, יאבד משה ואלף
 that not a single soul from Israel will perish.”⁸⁶ [Moses] כיוצא בו ולא תאבד נפש אחת
 added, “Master of the Universe, what will humanity say, מישראל. עוד אמר רבש"ע מה
 ‘The feet that trampled the heavens and the hands that יאמרו הבריות רגלים שדשו ברקיע
 received the Torah and the mouth that spoke with God וידים שקבלו את התורה והפה
 should die. And if he could not be accepted in repentance שדבר עם ה' ימות, ואפילו הכי לא

84. *not destroy Israel* On God’s two vows, see DeutR 3:2, 7:10, and 11:10.

85. *seizing the rope at both ends* Means something like “having it both ways.” Moses wants to explain to God that he doesn’t want Israel to perish, quite the opposite, as he adds in the next sentence. But, it seems like the point here references the fact that God does not always follow through on God’s vows – God doesn’t destroy Israel after the incident with the Golden Calf, even though God swore to do so.

86. *Israel will perish* See close parallel in DeutR 7:10.

by God, may His name be blessed, and this is Moses, מה מצא תשובה מהשי"ת. זהו משה, מה יעשו ויאמרו שאר הבריות! what will the remainder of humanity do and say!?"⁸⁷

6 MOSES' PRAYER SHAKES THE HEAVENS

6.1 MOSES SEALS HIS OWN FATE

Rav said, "The death of Moses is mentioned [in Scripture] ten times:⁸⁸ 1) *Behold, the time is drawing near for you to die* (Deut. 31:14), 2) *You shall die on the mountain* (Deut. 32:50), 3) *For I must die* (Deut. 4:22), 4) *For I know that when I am dead* (Deut. 31:29), 5) *Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died* (Deut. 34:7), 6) *So Moses died there* (Deut. 34:5) and so forth. God decreed Moses's

אמר רב עשר פעמים נכתבה מיתת משה: א' הן קרבו ימיו למות, ב' ומות בהר, ג' כי אנכי מת, ד' כי ידעתי אחרי מותי, ה' ומשה בן מאה ועשרים שנה במותו, ו' וימת שם משה וכו'. עשר פעמים גזר הקב"ה מיתתו על

87. *humanity do and say* Moses' final point is a good one. If God will not accept Moses' prayer for repentance, the person in the world who has received more honor from God than any other, then how much less so will God accept the prayers for repentance from the average Israelite. In the end, Moses argues that God should accept his prayer, not for his, but for Israel's sake. See parallel in MidTan VE 6.

88. *ten times* MidrPM only cites six occurrences, but other traditions (DeutR 11:10, CJ 50:2, YS VY 68) cite the same ten. The additional four not mentioned in MidrPM are: 1) Deut. 31:27, 2) Deut. 33:1, 3) Josh. 1:1, and 4) Josh. 1:2. It is probable that MidrPM does not cite these additional four verses which are common in tradition due to a scribal error.

death ten times, and that he shouldn't enter the land, and משה ושלא יכנס לארץ ועדיין לא
 still the decree was not sealed until the High Court was נחתם עליו גזר דין עד שנגלה
 revealed to him,⁸⁹ and said [to Moses,] "*You shall not pass* עליו ב"ד הגדול ואמר לא תעבור
over the Jordan" (Deut. 3:27 & 31:2). And Moses made את הירדן הזה, ודבר זה כולו היה
 light of the entire matter and was not concerned about it, קל בעיני משה ולא היה מעלה על
 for he thought, "How many times did Israel sin and sure לבו, שהיה אומר כמה פעמים
 enough [when] I prayed for them, The Holy One, Blessed חטאו ישראל וכיון שהייתי
 be He, would pardon them and annul the decree.⁹⁰ [Surely] מתפלל עליהם היה הקב"ה סולח
 I who never sinned, when I pray to The Holy One, Blessed להם ומבטל הגזירה, אני שלא
 be He, [will God] not accept my prayer?! When The Holy חטאתי מעודי כשאתפלל להקב"ה
 One, Blessed be He, saw that Moses was not concerned לא יקבל תפילתי? כיון שראה
 [with the impending punishment] and did not want to pray הקב"ה שקל בעיני משה ולא רצה
 for himself, immediately, The Holy One, Blessed be He, להתפלל על עצמו מיד קפץ
 quickly decreed and finalized [his] judgement and swore הקב"ה וגזר וחתם עליו הדין

89. High Court Refers to the heavenly judicial court. Despite the fact that God decreed Moses' death ten times, Moses' fate was not sealed until it was ruled upon in the heavenly court. The point here is that the decision was not decreed unfairly by an authoritarian God, but adjudicated in a court (though God is the head of this high court. See DeutR 11:10, note 1.

90. annul the decree Other traditions (DeutR 11:10) explicitly cite such occurrences as Deut. 19:14 (the reference to the Golden Calf, Ex. 32:1ff) and Num. 14:12.

by His Great Name that [Moses] would not enter the land, ונשבע בשמו הגדול שלא יכנס
 as it says, *Therefore*,⁹¹ you shall not bring this congregation לארץ, שנאמר לכן לא תביאו את
 [into the land] (Num. 20:12). הקהל הזה,

6.2 MOSES' PRAYER SHAKES HEAVEN

When [Moses] saw that the decree against him had been כיון שראה שנחתם עליו גזר דין
 sealed, he resolved to fast and to stand in prayer⁹² and said, גזר תענית ועמד להתפלל ואמר
 "I will not move from here until you annul the entire איני זו מכאן עד שתבטל כל
 decree." He donned sackcloth and wallowed in the ashes⁹³ הגזירה. מה עשה לבש שק
 and stood in prayer before The Holy One, Blessed be He, והתפלש באפר ועמד בתפלה לפני
 הקב"ה חמש עשרה / חמש מאות
 וחמש עשרה / פעמים עד

91. *Therefore* Though this may not seem like an oath, other traditions (DeutR 11:10 & YS VY 81) cite I Sam. 3:14, "Therefore (לכן), I swear concerning the house of Eli," as evidence that לכן means the swearing of an oath.

92. *stand in prayer* In other traditions (CJ 50:4), Moses stands within a circle he draws on the ground. It is also possible that this is a reference to the universal myth of the Magical Ring, within which a hero acts to annul a decree. See also Ḥoni, the Circle-maker (TB Taan 23a), in this regard. The Angel of Death cannot enter the ring or circle!

93. *sackcloth and ... ashes* Sackcloth and ashes are Biblical signs of mourning and repentance, the ultimate sign of humility.

[no less than] fifteen times⁹⁴ until the heavens and earth and all the creatures were shaken. They said, “Perhaps it is the desire of The Holy One, Blessed be He, to create a new world.”⁹⁵ A voice from heaven came forth and said, “The desire [to renew] His world has not yet arrived; only that *in God’s hand is the soul of every human [and the breath of all mankind (ish)]* (Job 12:10), and ‘ish’ [man] refers to Moses, as it says, *And the man (ish), Moses [was very humble]* (Num. 12:3).⁹⁶ What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do? [God] proclaimed in all the firmaments and in all

שנזדעזעו שמים וארץ וכל יצורי
בראשית ואמרו שמא הגיע צביונו
של הקב"ה לחדש עולמו, יצאה
בת קול ואמרה, לא הגיע צביונו
של עולם אלא אשר בידו נפש כל
בשר איש, איש זה משה שנאמר
והאיש משה. מה עשה הקב"ה
הכריז בכל הרקיעים ובכל בתי
הדינים של מעלה שלא יקבלו
תפלות משה ואין לשום מלאך

94. fifteen times Other midrashic accounts (e.g., DeutR 11:10, CJ 50, YS VY) do not include this detail. Perhaps this comes from the numerical value of VE which is 515, only here the 500 is dropped due to a scribal error. It probably should read 515.

95. create a new world YS VY 86 adds the words “לכרות את העולם” – “to destroy the world” – which gives a better sense of fear the heavens and earth felt; they thought God was shaking the world to destroy it and create it a new.

96. the man (ish), Moses [was very humble] Though in MidrPM the whole verse is not quoted, other traditions (DeutR 11:10, CJ 50:4) the words *והאיש משה* to Num. 12:3. This citation of Num. 12:3 makes sense for two reasons. First, returning to the theme of Moses as man or god, Moses is declared a “man” (האיש). Second, it reinforces Moses’ donning of sackcloth and ashes because it validates his humility through the words *ענו מאד*.

the divine courts that they should not receive the prayers of
 Moses, and no angel [is permitted] to bring before [Me] the
 prayer of Moses because I have sealed the decree of death
 against him. The Holy One, Blessed be He, hastily called
 out to all the ministering angels and said to them, "Go down
 and shut all the gates so that Moses' prayer cannot ascend
 [to the heavens.] At that moment, the heavens, earth, all
 the foundations of the earth, and all the creatures were
 shaken because of Moses' prayer which was similar to a
 sword that tears and cuts,⁹⁷ and cannot be parried, and they
 were as astonished as Ezekiel (alluded), as it says, *Behind*
me I heard a great roaring sound (Ezek. 3:12). "*Great*"
 refers to Moses, as it is written, *Moreover, the man Moses*
was very great (Ex. 11:3).⁹⁸ When the Wheels of the

להביא לפני תפלת משה לפי
 שחתמתי גזר דין עליו למיתה.
 קרא הקב"ה לכל שרי הרקיע
 בבהלה ואמר להם רדו ונעלו כל
 שער ושער כדי שלא תעלה תפלת
 משה. באותה שעה נזדעזעו שמים
 וארץ וכל מוסדות הארץ ויצורי
 בראשית כולם מפני תפלת משה
 שהיתה דומה לחרב שקורע
 וחותר ואינו מתעכב, והתפלאו
 עליו כעין יחזקאל שנאמר ואשמע
 אחרי קול רעש גדול, גדול זה
 משה שכתוב בו גם האיש משה
 גדול מאד. בשעה שראו גלגלי

97. *sword that tears and cuts* Some traditions (CJ 50:5, YS VY 96) explain that Moses' prayer got its power from the 'Ineffable Name,' which Moses learned from Zagzagel (the scribe of all the heavenly host).

98. *much esteemed* This verse from Ex. was also cited in Section 5.1 and as it did there, here it is used to show the power of Moses – that he was like a god in Egypt. Additionally, read in conjunction with the verse from Ezekiel, Moses' prayer appears to have "god-like"

Chariot and ministering angels saw that The Holy One, ושרפי מעלה שלא קבל הקב"ה
 Blessed be He, did not accept Moses' prayer and did not תפלתו של משה ולא נשא לו פנים
 favor him and did not grant him [longer] life, immediately ולא נתן לו חיים, מיד פתחו כולם
 they all opened [their mouths] and said, "*Blessed is the* ואמרו ברוך ה' ממקומו
glory of God from His place (Ezek. 3:12); for before [God], שאין לפניו לא עולה ולא שכחה
 there is no injustice and no forgetting, nor favoritism⁹⁹ ולא משוא פנים בין קטן בין גדול.
 whether to the small or great."

6.3 MOSES' REQUEST FOR REWARD FOR HIS LEADERSHIP

And whence do we learn that Moses pleaded 515 ומנין שנתחנן משה תקט"ו
 supplications – the numerical value of va'Ethan, And תחנוניו? כמנין ואתחנן וגו',
 [Moses] pleaded etc. (Deut. 3:23)? [Moses] said to [God], אמר לפניו רבש"ע הרבה פעמים
 "Master of the Universe, many times I have been troubled נצטערתי בשביל ישראל עד שהיו
 for Israel until they became for You the treasured people לך עם סגולה ונחלה וראיתי
 and [Your] possession. And I witnessed their pain; will I בצרתן ולא אראה בשמחתם? הרי
 אני עושה תורתך פלסתר שכך

power; all the more reason for the heavens and earth to tremble. See parallel in DeutR 11:10.

99. *nor favoritism* MidrPM contrasts Moses' point from Section 5.6 which contends that if God will not receive Moses' prayer for repentance, all the less so for the rest of Israel. But, here God is praised because God does not show favoritism; all humans must meet the same end. See parallel in DeutR 11:10.

not [also] see their joy?¹⁰⁰ Behold You make Your Torah a כתיב ביומו תתן שכרו, ועכשיו
 fraud¹⁰¹, as it is written, *You must pay him his duty* (Deut. היכן שכרי של מ' שנה שיגעתי
 24:15).¹⁰² And now, where is my payment (reward) for the בשביל בניך ונצטערתי עליהם
 40 years [in the desert], that I toiled for Your children and במצרים ובים ובמדבר וקבעתי
 I suffered trouble for them in Egypt and at the Sea and in להם תורה ומצות, צרתם ראיתי
 the desert, and I fixed for them Torah and Commandments? וטובתם איני רואה, כי תאמר לי
 I witnessed their woe, but shall I not witness their strength? שלא אעבור את הירדן?
 For You say to me that I will not cross the Jordan. For 40 מארבעים שנה ועד עכשיו לא

100. see their joy YS VY remez 601 draws this out farther, explaining that Moses intensely labored to make sure that Israel accepted the Torah and commandments. During his struggles, Moses said to himself, “Just as I see their troubles [now], I will see their joy [later].” But, when their time for joy has arrived, God prevented Moses for witnessing it.

101. You make Here, in MidrPM, the Hebrew says אני, but in other traditions (DeutR 11:10, YS VY remez 601) it is written אתה, ‘you,’ meaning God. This appears to be a scribal error in MidrPM; it makes most sense here for Moses to be accusing God of making God’s Torah a fraud by not fulfilling Deut. 24:15.

102. pay him his duty The Biblical reference refers to a “needy and destitute laborer.” The verse requires that you must pay the worker his wages on the same day that he works. In this case, Moses is the “needy and destitute laborer” and God is the employer who owes Moses payment.

years until today I was not [merely] a teacher teaching and הייתי מורה הוראה ויושב
pronouncing judgment?¹⁰³ בישיבה?

6.4 GOD TRIES TO CONSOLE MOSES

Immediately, The Holy One, Blessed be He, began to מיד התחיל הקב"ה לפייסו, א"ל בני
console [Moses] and said to him, "My son Moses! Much משה! הרבה מתוקן לך לעוה"ב
has been stored up for you¹⁰⁴ in the World to Come, for שתשבע מכל מיני ג"ע ועדניו
you will enjoy all the delights of Paradise, as it says, *I שנאמר להנחיל אוהבי יש*
endow those who love me with substance; I will fill their ואוצרותיהם אמלא, אלו הצדיקים
treasuries (Prov. 8:21) – these are the righteous ones המקיימים את התורה מאהבה. אמר
[who] fulfill the Torah out of love. Samuel said, this שמואל אלו שלש מאות ועשר
עולמות של עוה"ב שעתיד הקב"ה

103. pronouncing judgment Other traditions (DeutR 11:10, CJ 50:7, YS VY, remez 601) end this passage with a quote from Hos. 12:1 rather than this final sentence in MidrPM. The combination of the alternative traditions and MidrPM seem to suggest that Moses is trying to say something like, “God, without me this people would be deceitful and treacherous. I have not just been a teacher and judge, but I have guided them and shaped them into a people who stands firm with You.”

104. stored up for you The idea is that during your life your deeds earn you merit. Throughout your life you store up your merit and in the World to Come, you can “cash-in” on that merit. For more on Moses’ rewards in the next world, see SN 135, ExR 47:3 and DeutR 11:9.

refers to the 310 worlds¹⁰⁵ in the World to Come that in the future, The Holy One, Blessed be He, will give to every righteous person according to the number 310. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, “Moses! Your days are over, but your light will not fade; you will have no need in the World to Come, not for the light of the sun and not for the light of the moon and stars. And you will not require eating and drinking and no clothing and dress, and no oil on your head and no shoes on your feet. For I in My honor will illuminate you, and from My honor I will cloth you and My glory will provide you dress, by My radiance I will purify your face. My sweetness will quench your throat. My chariots will be your vehicles; and I will give you My scepter that has engraved on it the Ineffable Name with which I created the world in the beginning, and from it I will give [to] you as an example for the world to come, My scepter, which is one of 8,760,000 of that of the World to Come. The Holy One,

ליתן לכל צדיק וצדיק כמנין י"ש. אמר לו הקב"ה משה! ימך בטלים ואורך אינו בטל, שלא תהא צריך לעולם הבא לא לאור החמה ולא לאור הלבנה וכוכבים ולא אכילה ושתיה ולא כסות ומלבוש ולא שמן לראשך ולא מנעלים לרגליך, שאני בכבודי מאיר לך, ומכבודי אשים לבושך ומהדרי אשים כסותך, ומזהרי אטהר פניך, וממתקי ארוה גרונך, וממרכבות רכובי אשים רכוביך, ומשרביט שלי שחקוק עליו שם המפורש שבו בראתי העולם תחלה ממנו נתתי לך דוגמא בעוה"ב. שרביט שלי אחד משמונת אלפים ושבע מאות וששים רבוא מאותו של עוה"ב. א"ל הקב"ה בעוה"ז עשיתי הרבה אותות

105. 310 worlds The very last mishnah in Tractate Uktzin 3:12 explains that God will give each righteous person 310 worlds in the world to come. The number 310 is the numerical value of *י"ש* from Prov. 8:21, “I will endow those who love me with substance (*yesh*).”

Blessed be He, said to [Moses], “In this world I made
 many miracles and signs. And through you, I took Israel
 out of Egypt, I split the sea for them, I caused manna to
 rain down for them, I made the bitter waters sweet, and I
 gave them the Torah and commandments, which equal
 [the number of] the sinews of man and the days of the
 year, and wars I won through you. Enough! Let it suffice
 you. The time of Joshua has arrived to lead Israel and in
 the future, I will write by the hand of Solomon, your
 disciple, *the sun rises and sets* (Ecc. 1:5).¹⁰⁶

ומופתים ועל ידך הוצאתי את
 ישראל ממצרים וקרעתי להם הים
 והמטירתי להם המן והפכתי מי מרה
 למתוק ונתתי להם תורה ומצות
 כנגד אברי האדם וכנגד ימות השנה,
 ומלחמות נצחתי על ידיך, דיך רב
 לך! הגיע יומו של יהושע לפרנס את
 ישראל ועתיד אני לכתוב ע"י שלמה
 תלמידך וזרח השמש ובא השמש.

7 MOSES' FINAL DAYS AND HOURS

7.1 MOSES' FINAL DAYS

Moses said [to God], “Master of the Universe, if I am not
 to lead Israel, [let] my sons or the sons of Aaron, my
 brother, take my place and they will succeed me. God said
 [to Moses], “And he (Joshua) will bequeath them the land”

אמר משה רבש"ע אם איני
 מפרנס את ישראל יכנסו בני
 תחתי או בני אהרן אחי וימלאו
 מקומי, אמר הקב"ה והוא

106. *rises and sets* The citation from Ecclesiastes points to the fleeting nature of life, even for a great man such as Moses. Just as the sun rises and sets each day, so, too, does life begin and end for every human. At some point, each person must give the world over to the next generation, just as Moses must give over his leadership to Joshua.

(Deut. 3:28).¹⁰⁷ When [Moses] saw the decree was given (יהושע) ינחיל אותם את הארץ. כיון שראה שנגזרה גזירה עליו concerning him, immediately *Moses went and talked* (Deut. 31:1) to them.¹⁰⁸ From the twenty-second of Tishrei¹⁰⁹ till מיד וילך משה וידבר אליהם, the first of Sh'vat, a span of 95 days, and in this time, The מכ"ב בתשרי עד א' בשבט Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him ten times that he תשעים וחמשה ימים ובזמן הזה would die. And he (Moses) waited until the first of Sh'vat. אמר לו הקב"ה עשר פעמים שימות, והיה ממתין עד אחד And then he went and summoned all of Israel, and taught בשבט, ואז הלך וקרא לכל the Torah to six-hundred-thousand in seventy languages, as ישראל, ופירש את התורה it says, *[Inscribe every word of this Teaching] upon the לששים רבוא בשבעים לשון stones most distinctly* (Deut. 27:8). And whence do we

107. he (Joshua) Moses requests that his leadership be passed to a son or nephew. Though Joshua is not a son of Moses or Aaron, MidrPM treats him as such. God's response does not appear to be at odds with Moses' request, but reinforces the notion that Joshua is like a close relative to Moses.

108. to them Meaning, to the Israelite people. As soon as Moses realizes his life is coming to an end, his first thought is of Israel and the transfer of power to Joshua.

109. twenty-second of Tishrei The holiday that falls on this day on the Jewish calendar is Shmini Atzeret/Simchat Torah. This is an appropriate choice for Moses to begin speaking with Israel because it is the day when cycles end and begin. We end the reading of Deuteronomy with Moses' death and begin reading Genesis with creation, just as the cycle of Moses' leadership ends and the cycle of Joshua's leadership begins.

learn that on the first of Sh'vat Moses expounded the Torah ומנין שנאמר באר היטב וגו'.
 to Israel, as it says, *It was in the fortieth year, on the first שבאחד בשבט באר משה התורה*
day of the eleventh month, that Moses addressed [the לישראל שנאמר ויהי בארבעים
Israelites] (Deut. 1:3). From the first of Sh'vat to the שנה בעשתי עשר חדש באחד
 seventh of Adar¹¹⁰ is a span of 36 days and in those same לחדש דבר משה, מאחד בשבט
 days [Moses explained] the Torah to Israel. עד ז' באדר ל"ו ימים ובאותם
 ימים פירש התורה לישראל,

7.2 MOSES' FINAL DAY

7.2.1 MOSES' FINAL WORDS FOR THE PEOPLE

On the 7th of Adar he died. On the very day that [he] died]שבועה באדר נפטר, [עמוד 365
 [Moses] knew [that this was to be his last day], for a ובאותו יום שמת היה יודע, שהיתה
 heavenly voice came forth and said, "Take heed Moses, בת קול יוצאת ואומרת הזהר משה
 you have no [more] life in [this] world, but for this day." בעצמך שאין לך חיים בעולם כ"א
 היום הזה לבד.

R. Helbo said, On the same day that Moses, our teacher, אמר ר' חלבו באותו יום שמת
 peace be upon him, died, he wrote thirteen Torah מרע"ה כתב י"ג תורות ספר תורה

110. *seventh of Adar* There are many traditions about the day Moses died. Josephus explains that Moses died on the first day of the last month of the year, the 1st of Adar (Josephus was still operating in a world where Nisan was the first month of the year). The tradition generally claims Moses died on the 7th of Adar (e.g., TY 34, MidrTan VE 6).

scrolls,¹¹¹ a Torah for each tribe, and not even half the day
 was over. After that, he called to each tribe and gave them
 the Torah and the commandments and the most excellent
 Torah scroll (from the 13) he placed in the ark. [Moses]
 warned and rebuked each of them¹¹² individually, the men
 and the women separately, and he said to them, "Be
 careful of the honor of the Torah and the
 commandments." And some say that Gabriel came down
 and took the Torah from the hand of Moses and brought
 it back up to the great court on high to inform [the

לכל שבט ושבט ועדיין לא הגיע חצי
 היום, אח"כ קרא לכל שבט ושבט
 ונתן להם התורה והמצוות ואותו
 ס"ת (הי"ג) מובחר שבכולן הניחו
 בצד הארון, והזהירם והוכיחם לכל
 אחד ואחד בפני עצמו, אנשים לבד
 ונשים לבד ואמר להם הזהרו בכבוד
 התורה והמצוות, ויש אומרים שירד
 גבריאל ונטל ספר תורה מידו של
 משה והעלה אותו לב"ד הגדול של

111. thirteen Torah scrolls Tradition (MidrPss 90:3) explains that Moses wrote one Torah for each tribe and one for the Ark, so that if anyone should try to falsify anything in the Torah, they would not be able to since people could check the scroll in the Ark (CJ 51:5). See also DeutR 9:9 and PdRK, Supplement 1:8 in this regard.

112. rebuked each of them In other traditions (MidrPss 90:3), Moses does not rebuke each of the tribes, but instead blesses eleven of them, minus Simeon. This appears to be unique to MidrPM. The point is that each Israelite tribe should remember to observe the commandments. It is possible that this rebuking developed out of the tradition to not bless Simeon because the head of the tribe of Simeon slept with a Moabite woman and worshiped Baal Peor (Num. 25:14). MidrPM might be overly concerned with idol worship and thus requires Moses to admonish all of the tribes so they don't commit such an offence.

heavens] of the righteousness of Moses. And he passed מעלה להודיע צדקתו של משה, והיה מוליכו בכל רקיע ורקיע שזנאמר צדקת ה' עשה ומשפטיו עם ישראל, ולא עוד אלא שנשמתן של צדיקים קורים בספר תורה של מרע"ה בשני ובחמישי ובמועדים. Moreover, the souls of the righteous read from the Torah of Moses, our Teacher, peace be upon him, on Monday and Thursday, as well as on [the Sabbath] and on Holidays.¹¹⁴

7.2.2 MOSES TRANSFERS POWER/KNOWLEDGE TO JOSHUA

R. Josiah said, At that hour, Moses bestowed great honor א"ר יאשיה באותה שעה עשה משה ליהושע כבוד גדול ופאר רב בפני בני ישראל.

113. *judgements with Israel* The citation here is from Moses' final blessing to the tribe of Gad. In fact, the "He" is referring to Gad, but MidrPM plays on the verse and makes it appear as if it refers to Moses – who establishes the system of God's justice. However, the important part of the verse is actually left out. The verse begins, "He chose for himself the best," (NJPS), which MidrPM thinks is the Torah which Gabriel passed through all the heavens. Alternative traditions (ARNB pg. 151, BT Sot 7a) use this verse to prove that Moses was buried in the territory of Gad, since Gad's territory was the best and a portion was reserved for the "revered chieftain" (NJPS), ostensibly Moses.

114. *Monday and Thursday as well as on [the Sabbath] and on Holidays* These are the traditional days on which Torah is read. It is as if by virtue of reading Torah one becomes righteous like Moses.

There was a herald who went out from him to all the camps of Israel saying, "Come and listen to the words of the new prophet who has risen for us today." All of Israel approached to honor Joshua. Then Moses commanded to bring a golden throne, a crown of pearls, a royal helmet, and a purple robe. And Moses arranged and set in order the benches of the Sanhedrin, the battalion leaders, and the priests.¹¹⁵ After that, Moses went to Joshua and dressed him and placed the crown on him and seated him on the golden throne and assigned a translator for him to expound before Israel.¹¹⁶ And who was the translator? Caleb, son of Jephuneh.¹¹⁷ And

ישראל, והיה כרוז יוצא מלפניו בכל מחנה ישראל לאמר בואו ושמעו דברי הנביא החדש שיקום עלינו היום, עלו כל ישראל לכבודו של יהושע, ואח"כ צוה משה להביא כסא של זהב ועטרה של מרגליות וכובע של מלכות ולבוש ארגמן, והיה משה עומד ומסדר ומעריך מערכות וספסלים של סנהדרין ושל ראשי גדודין ושל כהנים, ואח"כ הלך משה אל יהושע והלבישו ונתן עליו העטרה והושיבו על כסא של זהב

115. Then Moses... the priests. Each of the items is a symbol of power and status. One tradition (TY 34) explains that the angels, Michael and Gabriel, used very similar symbols to adorn Moses' bier. Transferring the symbols to Joshua in front of all of Israel lets them know that the leadership has changed. Targum Yerushalmi explains how Moses laid his hands on Joshua to transfer the power. Also the description of Moses dressing Joshua is the same as the angel preparing Moses' bier.

116. expound before Israel Regarding the translator for Joshua, see SD 305.

117. Caleb, son of Jephuneh Caleb and Joshua are connected because they are the two spies who tell the truth upon returning from scouting the land of Israel (Num. 14:1ff).

Joshua was expounding before all of Israel and in the presence of Moses, his teacher. And what was the midrash that Joshua expounded? "Awaken!¹¹⁸ Sing O' heaven of heavens above. Awaken foundations of the earth below; awaken and trill all the orders of creation; awaken and rejoice all the mountains of the world and praise and rejoice all the hills of the earth; Awaken and break out into song ye' heavenly hosts of the firmament and sing and announce all the tents of Jacob; sing all the dwellings of Israel, listen and hearken to my words. Pay heed to everything! Take in joy upon yourselves and in your souls the commandments of your God. Open your mouth and let your tongue speak and give honor to God, your Savior, and give thanks to your God and put your trust in Him, because He is One and there is none second

והעמיד עליו מתורגמן לדרוש בפני כל ישראל, ומי היה המתורגמן כל בן יפונה. ויהושע דורש בפני כל ישראל ובפני משה רבו, ומהו המדרש שדרש יהושע? עורו רונו שמי השמים העליונים, העירו מוסדות הארץ התחתונים, עורו וסלסלו סדרי בראשית, עורו והרנינו הררי עולם והללו גבעות אדמה, עורו ופצחו צבאות רקיע ושירו וספרו כל אהלי יעקב, שירו כל משכנות ישראל, שמעו והאזינו כל אמרי, שימו לבבכם לכל דברי, קבלו בשמחה עליכם ועל נפשותיכם מצות אלהיכם, פתחו פיכם ולשונכם ותנו

Additionally, Caleb gets the job because of his strong voice (LotJN 901). Caleb is Miriam's husband.

118. *Awaken!* The last part of Section 7.2.2 reads like a prayer, even though it is described as a midrash. Joshua calls on all of creation and Israel to wake up and accept the commandments and praise God. He acknowledges God's covenant with Israel and Moses' leadership from slavery. It is an affirmation for the soon-to-be-leader that he recognizes where he comes from and that God remains important above all else.

to Him; there is none like God amongst the gods, there
 is none equal to Him among the angels, and beside Him,
 there is none that is your Lord. To His praise there is no
 end and to his fame there is no end. To His miracles there
 is no fathoming, to His works there is no number. And
 He will guard for us the oaths He swore to our
 forefathers, and establish for us the covenant and loving-
 kindness, and the oath that was sworn to them through
 Moses, our teacher, who delivered us through many
 miracles and took us out from slavery to freedom, and
 divided the the sea and gave us six hundred and thirteen
 commandments.” Moses said, For thirty-six years
 Joshua served me in the desert, as it is says, *His*
attendant, Joshua, son of Nun, a youth (Ex. 33:11).¹¹⁹

כבוד לאל מושיעכם ותהיו מודים
 לפני אדוניכם ותנו עליו בטחונכם, כי
 הוא אחד ואין שני לו ואין כמוהו
 באלהים ואין כערכו במלאכים ואין
 זולתו באדונים, אשר לשבחו אין קץ
 ולתהלתו אין אחרית וסוף,
 לנפלאותיו אין חקר ואין מספר
 לעלילותיו, והוא ישמור לנו שבועת
 אבותינו ויקיים לנו הברית והחסד
 והשבועה אשר נשבע להם ע"י משה
 רבינו, אשר גמלנו ברוב פלאים
 ושהוציאנו מעבדות לחרות, ושקרע
 לנו את הים, ושנתן לנו תרי"ג מצות.
 - אמר משה ל"ו שנה היה יהושע
 משרת אותי במדבר שנאמר ומשרתו
 יהושע בן נון נער,

119. *Joshua, son of Nun, a youth* The reference to the verse from Exodus explains that for the 36 years that Moses lead Israel through the desert, while Moses was speaking face to face with God, Joshua remained in the tent, ostensibly performing duties that served Moses.

7.2.3 MOSES SERVES JOSHUA

When the time to execute the decree concerning Moses arrived, The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to [Moses], “*Behold, your days are coming close [that you must] die. Summon Joshua* (Deut. 31:14) and charge Joshua.”¹²⁰ Moses, the righteous one, reasoned and said, “Perhaps, I must die because the time of Joshua, my student, has arrived, since he will preside over Israel in the future and lead them, and it is because of this that it was decreed that I will not enter the land and eat of its fruits. But, better for me to live on and let Joshua be the leader so that I may enter the land of Israel.”¹²¹ What did Moses do? From the first

וכשהגיע גזרה של משה וא"ל הקב"ה הן קרבו ימיו למות קרא את יהושע, ויצו את יהושע, היה משה הצדיק דן מעצמו ואומר שמא מפני שהגיעה שעת יהושע תלמידי אני מת, שהוא עתיד לפרנס את ישראל ולבוא בראשם, ובשביל זה היה עלי גזר דין שלא אכנס לארץ ולא לאכול מפירותיה, אבל מוטב שאחיה ויהיה יהושע פרנס ואני נכנס לא"י. מה עשה משה? מאחד בשבט עד ששה באדר היה הולך שחרית וערבית

120. charge Joshua This represents a change from Section 3.1 and the true reading of Deut. 31:14, where it is God who instructs Joshua, not Moses. This transfer of power from Moses to Joshua seems more in line with a tradition (BT Sot 13b, EY Sot) that there was a Sabbath of Transmittance on which Moses transferred his power to Joshua inside the tent.

121. I may enter the land of Israel Here, Moses reasons differently than before. He is not concerned with God’s punishment preventing him from entering the land, but with Joshua’s leadership. Moses thinks that the reason he has to die is so that Joshua can become the leader of Israel. So, he reasons that if he will just hand the reigns over to Joshua, then he will be able to live.

of Sh'vat until the sixth of Adar, every morning and evening he would go and serve Joshua like a student serves his teacher. Those thirty-six days Moses counted a day per year, [one for each of the 36 years Joshua served Moses].

ומשמש ליהושע כתלמיד לרב, ואותם ל"ו יום עלו למשה יום לשנה.

How did Moses serve Joshua? Every day Moses would get up at midnight and go to the [tent] door of Joshua and would take the key and open the door. He would enter, take a shirt, shake it out and place it next to [Joshua's] pillow. He would then take his shoes and clean them and place them by the side of the bed. Then he would take his vest and coat, his golden helmet and the crown of pearls and examine, clean, and polish them, and arrange them before him on the nape [of the chair] of gold. He would then bring a jug of water and a golden bowl, and place them on the nape of the chair. Still Joshua did not awaken from his sleep. After that Moses ordered [them] to sweep and straighten up the inside of Joshua's tent like it was the tent of Moses. And he brought in the chair of gold, and spread over it a cloth of fine linen and wool, and he arranged for expensive and beautiful furnishings as is the custom of

כיצד היה משה משמש את יהושע? בכל יום היה משה עומד מחצות לילה והולך לפתחו של יהושע ונטל המפתח ופותח את הדלת ונכנס ונוטל חלוק ומנערה ומניחה אצל מראשותיו, ונוטל מנעליו ומתקנן ומניחן בצדי המטה, ונוטל טליתו וכסותו וסודרו וכובע של זהב ועטרת מרגליות ומבחינן ומצרפן ומזקקן ומסדרן לפניו על סילון של זהב. שוב היה מביא קיתון של מים וקערה של זהב ומניחן על הסילון, ועדיין יהושע לא היה נעור משנתו, ואח"כ היה מצוה משה לנער ולכבד בית אהלו של יהושע כעין אהלו של משה, ומכניס כסא הזהב, ופורש סדין של בוך וסדין של מילת, ומסדר כלים יקרים ונאים שלו כמנהג המלכים. ואחר כך היה יוצא כרוז: משה עומד באהלו של

kings.¹²² After that, a herald proclaimed: “Moses יהושע ואומר כל המבקש להקביל פניו stands in Joshua’s tent announcing that all who wish דבר של יהושע יבא ויקביל, שנפל דבר to greet Joshua come and greet [him]. [According to] על ביהושע מאת ה' להיות פרנס על the word [of God], Joshua was to be the leader of ישראל. Israel.

7.2.4 THE PEOPLE ARE SKEPTICAL

At that very moment, every person in Israel who heard the באותה שעה כל יחיד ויחיד herald was afraid and began shaking, and said, "I have a שבישראל שהיה שומע הכרוז היה מפחד ומזעזע ואומר אני חושש headache,"¹²³ so he would not [have to] go," and cried, בראשי כדי שלא ילך, ובוכה אוי “*Woe to you, O’ land, that your king is a child* (Ecc. לך ארץ שמלכך נער! ובת קול 10:16)!¹²⁴ But a Voice from Heaven said, "*When Israel*

122. *custom of kings* The symbols here are similar to those mentioned in section 7.2.2, but more are added to emphasize Moses’ servitude to Joshua and Joshua’s new status as leader of Israel. Though Moses is serving Joshua, MidrPM depicts him doing it surreptitiously, while Joshua is still sleeping, which would lead to problems later.

123. *I have a headache* When Israel hears that Joshua is taking over as the leader of the Israelite people, the people refuse to go witness his transfer of power.

124. *your king is a child* Fox (Fox 2004) explains that “child” might better be read as slave since it is placed in contrast with “master” from Ecc. 10:17. He writes, “Koheleth believe that a slave (servant) or lowly person who has come to power, having risen so far

was a child, I loved him (Hos. 11:1)." Also the earth , אומרת כי נער ישראל ואוהבהו,
 opened up its mouth and said,¹²⁵ *"I have been young and נער* גם הארץ פתחה פיה ואמרה
am now old (Ps. 37:25)." The elders of Israel, all the זקני ומתקבצים זקני
 leaders of the brigades and the heads of the tribes and the ישראל וכל שרי הגדודים וראשי
 captains of the thousands and hundreds and of tens השבטים ושרי האלפים והמאות
 gathered together.¹²⁶ When they came to Moses, he sat והעשרות. כשבאו אצל משה היה
 each of them according to his rank. מושב כל אחד ואחד לפי גדולתו,

above his station, will be unworthy and degenerate" (Fox 2004, 70). This perfectly describes the Israelites' negative and skeptical opinion of Joshua at this point in MidrPM, especially compared to their departing master, Moses.

125. *a Voice from Heaven said... the earth...said* Both the heavens and the earth attempt to persuade the Israelite people to accept the new leadership of Joshua. The verse from Hosea explains that since God, the Master of the Universe, loves the "slave," how much more so should the Israelite people, who were once slaves themselves, love Joshua. Even the earth itself weighs in with the verse from Psalms which continues, "but I have never seen a righteous man abandoned" (NJPS). In this citation, the earth appears not only to be arguing for Joshua, but also admonishing the Israelites for acting in a way the earth has never seen – "abandoning" this righteous man.

126. *gathered together* Despite the fact that the people refused to gather at the tent of Joshua, all the leaders of Israel gathered there to show their loyalty for Joshua. These heads of Israel served as models to try and convince the people to follow Joshua as well.

7.2.5 JOSHUA IS EMBARRASSED

When Moses saw that Joshua woke up from his sleep, he entered [his tent] and took out his shirt and gave it to him. When Joshua recognized him, he was ashamed¹²⁷ and took the shirt and covered his body. He dressed himself, trembling, and cast himself at the feet of Moses and said to him, "Be not the cause of my dying,¹²⁸ my teacher [when I have only lived] half of my days because of the authority that comes to me from The Holy One, Blessed be He." Moses said to him, "My son, don't fear, you have not sinned because of this. In accordance with the measure you meted out to me, I will mete out to you. You have served me with a pleasant countenance, likewise I will serve you, my student.¹²⁹ [Didn't I teach you thusly,] Love

וכיון שרואה משה שיהושע נעור משנתו היה נכנס ונוטל חלוקו ונותנה לו בידו, כיון שהיה יהושע מכיר בו היה מתבייש ונוטל חלוקו ומכסה גופו ולובש בזעזעות נפשו ונופל על רגליו של משה ואומר לו אל תהרגני רבי בחצי ימי מפני השררה שבאה עלי מאת הקב"ה, אמר לו משה בני אל תתיירא אין לך עון בזה, במדה שמדדת לי אמדד לך ששמשתיני בסבר פנים יפות כך שמשתיך תלמידי, ואהבת לרעך כמוך, לא כך שניתי לך יהי

127. *ashamed* Joshua was ashamed because his master and teacher, Moses, whom he has served his whole life, was now serving him.

128. *the cause of my dying* Joshua is trembling in fear because he does not know why Moses is standing over him in his tent. Joshua knows that God has promised the leadership of the Israelite people to him, but perhaps he is afraid that Moses wants to kill him for it.

129. *my student* Moses assures Joshua that he has done no wrong, Moses is merely there to serve Joshua as Joshua served him. It is interesting though that Moses calls him

כבוד תלמידך חביב עליך כשלך, *your fellow as yourself* (Lev. 19:18)? Was it not I who
 לסוף הניחו ליהושע עד שישב על *instructed you, Let your student's honor be as precious to*
 סילון של זהב כדרך מלכי העולם, *you as your own* (PA 4:12).¹³⁰ [Moses] did not rest until
 ועל כרחו עמד לו ומשמשו לכל *Joshua sat on the chair of gold as is the custom of the kings*
 צרכו ועל כרחו הניח עליו קרני *of the world. And against Joshua's will, he stood for him*
 ההוד למעלה מכולם. והיה מצוי *and served him in all his needs and laid upon him the*
 אצלו זנגזאל המלאך רבו וסופר *beams of glory*¹³¹ to elevate him above everyone. The

“my student.” Earlier in MidrPM Section 3.2 Moses calls Joshua “my teacher.” This raises the question, which will appear later, “Can a teacher really become the student’s servant?”

130. *precious to you as your own* At first glance, it seems that MidrPM wants to use this verse from PA and the citation from Leviticus to prove Moses’ dedication to serving Joshua. However, PA 4:12 contains another verse worth mentioning, “And the reverence owing to your master should be like the awe owing to Heaven” (Neusner, *Torah from our Sages Pirke Avot* 1984). If Joshua had been Moses’ student for thirty-six years and standing in awe of him like one stands in awe of heaven, it would explain his fear at waking up to Moses serving him, and it would also seem to make it difficult for Joshua to ever feel comfortable allowing Moses to become his servant.

131. *beams of glory* This refers to the קרני עור, “rays of light,” which Moses acquired while he was on Mt. Sinai with God (Ex. 34:29ff). The beams were so radiant the Israelites could not speak to him unless he wore a veil over his face. One tradition (LotJN 898)

angel Zagzagel, his teacher and the scribe for all the
angels, was next to [Moses] when he finished [teaching
Joshua] all the secrets of the Torah.¹³² When Joshua was
completely dressed, they came and told him, “All of Israel
are waiting for you.” Immediately, Moses took Joshua and
brought him out of his tent. When Israel saw Joshua
walking ahead as the leader, they all trembled¹³³ and stood
up, while the two of them went to the place of the great,
next to the golden throne and [Moses] seated [Joshua] on
it in against his will. When Israel saw this, they all cried
על כל בני מרום, בשעה שסיים
עמו כל סתרי תורה. כיון שנתעטף
יהושע יפה באו ואמרו כל ישראל
מאחרים לכם, מיד תפש משה את
יהושע והוציאו מתוך אהלו. כיון
שראו ישראל את יהושע הולך
בראש נזדעזעו כולם ועמדו על
רגליהם והלכו שניהם עד מקום
גדולים אצל כסא [עמוד 366]
הזהב והושיבו עליו בעל כרחו.
כשראו ישראל כך בכו כולם וגם

explains that Moses received these “beams of glory” from his teacher Zagzagel, the scribe of the angels, when he finished teaching Moses the secrets on the Torah.

132. *secrets of the Torah* Just as Zagzagel taught all the secrets of the Torah to Moses (LotJN 898) and then gave him the “beams of glory,” now Moses must do the same to Joshua in order to transfer leadership.

133. *trembled* The same Hebrew root, זעזע, “trembling,” is used to describe the Israelite people and Joshua when they see Moses acting as a servant. MidrPM wants to point out the fear and anxiety felt by both the incoming leader and the people when a revered leader steps down.

and Joshua himself cried and said, "Why all this greatness and honor to me?"¹³⁴,
 יהושע בכה ואמר גדולה וכבוד למה לי?

7.3 FIVE HOURS LEFT: MOSES AND JOSHUA ARE THE SAME

A heavenly voice went forth¹³⁵ [from heaven] יצאה בת קול ואמרה למשה אין לך חיים אלא
 and said to Moses, "You only five hours left of חמש שעות בלבד, מיד צעק משה ואמר
 life." Immediately, Moses cried out and said to ליהושע שב כמלך בפני העם, ודרשו שניהם
 Joshua, "Sit like a king before the people." And כאחד בפני כל ישראל, ונדמה להם פני משה
 the two of them expounded as if they were one כפני חמה ופני יהושע כפני לבנה. משה קורא
 before all of Israel.¹³⁶ Moses' face shown to them משה מפרש מקרא שהיה משה
 like the sun and the face of Joshua like the face קורא ויהושע קורא ומשה מפרש ולא היה

134. *greatness and honor to me* Even though Joshua knows that he will be taking over the leadership from Moses, he does not understand all the pomp and circumstances surrounding this honor with which he is uncomfortable. It also underscores his very human response in the presence of his teacher.

135. *A heavenly voice went forth* As MidrPM continues, this heavenly voice will appear again and again counting down the hours of Moses' life. Each hour will characterize Moses differently as he approaches death.

136. *as if they were one* Moses and Joshua would explain the teachings and there was no difference of opinion between the two. It was as if teacher and student were of one mind which should mollify the people's fears.

of the moon.¹³⁷ Moses read and Joshua explained עליהם חלוקה זה על זה, ונמצאו דבריהם
 the reading which Moses read, and when Joshua מכוונים כאחד, ודומים כחרוזי מרגליות של
 read, Moses explained and there was no מלכים ועליהם אמר שלמה דברי חכמים
 difference [of opinion] between them. Their גו' כדרבנות
 words matched and they were like pearls in a
 royal crown. About them, Solomon said, *The*
sayings of the wise are like goads (Ecc. 12:11),¹³⁸

137. *the sun...the moon* Even though Moses and Joshua are of one mind, there is still a difference between them. They are both compared to celestial objects, but MidrPM's characterization of them makes Moses greater than Joshua, again subtly raising the question, "Can Joshua really lead Israel while Moses is alive?" For a parallel, see BT BB 75a.

138. *The sayings of the wise are like goads* The inclusion of this verse from Ecclesiastes is curious. A base reading of the verse suggests that the teaching of Moses and Joshua acts like an goad, prodding the Israelites towards better behavior, but also like a goad it is painful and provoking. Perhaps this refers to the pain that the Israelites experienced when they did not always listen and observe.

However, the second half of the verse, "They were given by one Shepherd," which MidrPM leaves out offers a more interesting read. The "one Shepherd" might mean Moses, but probably means God. Basing his opinion on a homily from BT Hag 3b, Fox (Fox 2004) suggests that the traditional understanding of this verse is "to advocate an extraordinary

Referring to those *who dwell in the garden* (SoS. היושבים/היושבת/ בגנים וגו'.
8:13).¹³⁹

7.4 FOUR HOURS LEFT: MOSES PLEADS WITH GOD

And while Joshua and Israel were sitting before Moses, a ועדיין היו יושבים יהושע
heavenly voice came out and said, “You only have four וישראל לפני משה, יצאה בת
hours more to live.” Moses said to The Holy One, Blessed קול ואמרה אין לך חיים אלא ד'
be He, “Master of the Universe, if is it because of my student שעות, אמר משה לפני הקב"ה
רבון העולמים אם מפני תלמידי
אתה דוחה אותי אני נוהג

openness to different opinions in the study of Torah. All scholars of Torah are speaking God's words, as it were, even when arriving at diverse and contradictory opinions” (Fox 2004, 84). Though Fox will eventually reject this reading, the traditional understanding is helpful to understanding how MidrPM uses the verse.

It seems that MidrPM wants to suggest that even though Moses and Joshua explain the Torah as if they are of one mind, when Joshua takes over the leadership, inevitably he will come to different conclusions than Moses. This can be painful for the Israelites, like a goad is to an ox. But, at the end of the day, it is all the word of God and meant for the benefit of the Israelite people.

139. *who dwell in the garden* MidrPM changes the first word of this verse from היושבת to היושבים, “the one who dwells” to the “those who dwell” – seemingly to make the verse refer to the Israelite people. It is also possible that it is just a scribal error.

that you reject me, I can act like his pupil;¹⁴⁰ let it be like he כתלמיד לפניו, הוא ככהן גדול
 is a High Priest and I am like a common priest; he is like a ואני ככהן הדיוט, הוא כמלך
 king and I am like a servant.” The Holy One, Blessed be He, ואני כעבד. אמר הקב"ה
 said [to Moses], “I swore on My great name, which the נשבעתי בשמי הגדול ששמים
 heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain, that you shall ושמי השמים לא יכלכלוהו שלא
 not cross this Jordan.” Moses said [to God], “Master of the תעבור את הירדן הזה. אמר
 Universe, allow me to be like a bird¹⁴¹ flying through the air משה רבון העולמים תן לי רשות
 by the power of the Ineffable Name. Or make me like a fish ואהיה כעוף הפורח באויר בכח
 and I will spread my two arms like two fins and my hair will שם המפורש, או עשה אותי כדג
 ואשא שתי זרועותי כשני
 סנפירים וכל שערוותי הפך אותם
 כקשקשים ואקפוץ אל הירדן

140. *I can act like his pupil* As the clock on Moses' life winds down, he reverts again to pleading with God. He thought that if he became Joshua's servant, he would be allowed to live, but that was not the case.

141. *be like a bird* Moses attempts to find a loophole in God's vow, so that he might be able to see the Land of Israel. Later in Section 7.7.1, Moses will petition God in a similar though more extensive way to turn him into an animal in an effort to see the Land of Israel. This request, apparently unique to MidrPM, is characterized by the strange idea that he fly by the power of God's Ineffable Name. This continues the theme of the power of God's Ineffable name, which was also referenced in Section 6.2. See parallel in DeutR 11:10.

turn into scales so that I may jump into the Jordan¹⁴² and see ואראה את הארץ, א"ל הקב"ה
 the Land. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to [Moses], "If אם נעשה לך כך הרי אני עובר
 it happened to you like that, behold I would transgress my על השבועה, א"ל רבש"ע
 oath." [Moses] said to [God], "Master of the Universe, carry הניחני על כנפי העננים כשיעור
 me on the wings of your clouds a measure of three parasangs ג' פרסאות למעלה מן הירדן
 over the Jordan and the clouds will be below [me] and I will ויהיו עננים מלמטה ואני
 see the whole land." [God] said to him, "This seems to me מלמעלה ואראה את כל הארץ,
 as if I am transgressing My oath." [Moses] said to [God], א"ל חשוב עלי כאלו עברתי על
 "Master of the Universe, cut me up, limb by limb,¹⁴³ and שבועתי. אמר לפניו רבש"ע
 throw me over the Jordan and then revive me so that I will חתוך אותי אבר אבר והשליכני
 see the land." [God] said to him, "Behold it is as if I would אחר הירדן והחיני ואראה את
 transgress My oath." [Moses] said to [God], "Show me the הארץ, א"ל הרי הוא כאלו

142. *jump into the Jordan* Moses continues to try to find loopholes in God's oath. Since "Jumping into the Jordan" is not the same as "crossing the Jordan," it implies that he can "swim" to the Promised Land.

143. *limb by limb* Moses is no longer asking to live, he only wants to enter the land of Israel. This might be a recollection of other traditions, (e.g., DeutR 2:8) in which Moses requests that his bones be brought into the Land of Israel like Joseph's bones. God explains to Moses that Joseph gets to be buried in the Land of Israel because he acknowledged (or did not deny) the land and his origins (Gen. 39:14, Gen. 40:15). However, Moses failed to correct the daughters of Jethro when they called him "an Egyptian" (Ex. 2:19). See also MidrTan on Deut. 34:4 and the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Parashat Amalek in this regard.

land in a glance of an eye.” [God] said to him, “In this matter, I will comply with you,” as it says, *You may view the land from a distance, but you shall not enter it* (Deut. 32:52). And The Holy One, Blessed be He, showed him the land, four hundred parasangs by four hundred parasangs like the size of a garden within an orange grove. And [God] gave [such] strength to his eyes so that he could see it all, the concealed was clearly visible, and the hidden was revealed, the distant was [brought] close so that he would see it all. [God] said to him, *This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, [Isaac, and Jacob, ‘I will assign it to your offspring.’ I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross there]* (Deut. 34:4).

עברתי על שבועתי, א"ל הראני את הארץ במראית עין, א"ל בדבר הזה אני שומע לך שנאמר כי מנגד תראה את הארץ ושמה לא תעבור, והראהו הקב"ה את הארץ ד' מאות פרסה על ד' מאות פרסה כשיעור ערוגה בתוך פרדס, ונתן כח בעיניו כדי שיראנה כולה, הטמון בגבוה והסתר בגלוי והרחוק בקרוב כדי שיראנה כולה, וא"ל זאת הארץ אשר נשבעתי לאברהם וגו'.

7.5 THREE HOURS LEFT: PROBLEMS IF MOSES WOULD LIVE

By now, another hour had passed. A heavenly voice came out and said, "Don't struggle uselessly, for you have only three hours more of life in this world." Moses said to [God], "Master of the Universe, - place me amongst the children of Gad and Reuben¹⁴⁴, that I may be one of them,

עד כאן עלתה לו שעה, יצתה ב"ק ואמרה לא תצטער עצמך שאין לך חיים בעוה"ז אלא ג' שעות, אמר משה רבש"ע הניחני אצל בני גד ובני ראובן ותהי נפשי כאחד מהם,

144. Gad and Reuben The territories of Gad and Reuben are not on the other side of the Jordan, thus God's vow would not be broken if Moses remained there. Also, this

and Joshua will rule and enter the land with Israel.” The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, “You want to make a fraud of my Torah, in which it is written, *Three times a year all your males shall appear etc.* (Ex. 23:17, 34:23, & Deut. 16:16)?¹⁴⁵ When Israel sees that you don't make a pilgrimage [to the Sanctuary] what will they say? ‘If Moses, through whom the Torah and commandments were given, does not make a pilgrimage, all the less so [we will not]. As a result, you will nullify my

ויהושע ימלוך ויכנס לא"י עם ישראל, א"ל הקב"ה רוצה אתה לעשות תורת פלסתר שכתוב בה שלש פעמים בשנה יראה כל זכורך וגו', כשיראו ישראל שאינך עולה לרגל מה יאמרו, ומה משה שנתנה תורה ומצות על ידו אינו עולה לרגל אנו עאכו"כ, נמצא אתה מבטל מצותי, ועוד כתבתי על ידך מקץ שבע שנים במועד שנת השמיטה בבוא כל ישראל לראות את פני ה' אלהיך, אתה מבטל

appears to reference the many traditions (among them, SN 106, ARNB Chp. 25, PT Sot 7, BT Sot 13b, EY Sot) which explain that Moses was buried in the territories of Gad and Reuben. Moses was to be buried in Reuben because Moses was told he would die on Mt. Nebo (Deut. 32:49) and Mt. Nebo was in the territory of Reuben (Num. 32:37ff). Yet, the traditions that say he was buried in Gad are based on his final blessing in which Moses tells the tribe of Gad that it will receive a “portion of the lawgiver” (Deut. 33:21). To resolve the contradiction, some traditions tell us that Moses was carried by the Hand of God (wings of the Shechina) four miles within the part of Reuben, stretching out into the part of Gad.

145. *Three times a year* Referring to the three pilgrimage holidays: Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot.

commandments.¹⁴⁶ And more so, I wrote through you,¹⁴⁷ שעתו של יהושע בפני כל ישראל,
At the end of every seventh year, the year set for remission כשיהיה יהושע דורש בחג לעיני
 (Deut. 15:1) *when all Israel comes to appear before The* כל ישראל מה ישראל אומרים עד
Eternal your God (Deut. 31:11). You would cancel שאנו לומדים תורה מפי התלמוד
 Joshua's authority to lead all of Israel.¹⁴⁸ When Joshua התלמיד/ אנו הולכים לשמוע מפי
 expounds [the law] on the holidays in the presence of all

146. *you will nullify my commandments* Since Moses will be unable to cross the Jordan, he will not be able to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He literally will break God's commandments. But more significant is Moses' example to the Israelite people; God recognizes that Israel will do whatever Moses does. Since they will see that Moses does not make the pilgrimage, they will follow suit and then completely nullify those laws in the Torah. MidrPM recognizes the power Moses holds over the Israelite people while he is still alive; it is a power that is even greater than the commandments.

147. *I wrote through you* God recognizes (in these citations from Deut. 31:10ff) the power Moses holds because he was the one who delivered the law. All the Israelites know comes from the example of Moses. In a way, while he is alive, he holds more power than God because, in the eyes of the Israelites, all of Moses' actions reflect the will of God.

148. *You would cancel Joshua's authority* The mere fact that Moses is alive would subvert any authority that Joshua has. The people would always look to Moses instead of Joshua despite all Moses' attempts to become Joshua's servant. While Moses is alive, Joshua cannot truly take over the role of leader of Israel.

Israel, what will Israel say, 'Instead of learning Torah הרב ולומדים ממנו, ונמצא אתה מאבד תורתך. from the mouth of the "student", let us go and hear it from mouth of the teacher and learn from him. Thus, you would undo my Torah.

7.6 TWO HOURS LEFT: SAMMAEL'S JOY

By now, another hour passed, and a Heavenly Voice came עד כאן עלתה לו שעה אחת, יצתה ב"ק ואמרה לו משה משה! עד מתי אתה מצער עצמך שאין עוד Sammael, chief of the evil spirits,¹⁴⁹ waited wondering אלא ב' שעות. וסמאל ראש לשטנים היה מצפה מתי תגיע שעה שיפטר משה אולי יקבל [from the world]. Perhaps he would possess his soul like נשמתו כשאר בני אדם, כאדם [he does] for all humans? He was like a human waiting for המצפה לשמחה גדולה, כיון שראה מיכאל שר ישראל את the wicked, awaiting the death of Moses, he raised his voice

149. chief of the evil spirits Just as there are angels who help God, there are “evil spirits” who are like angels who also work with God, but have evil intentions. Sammael, also known as *Satan*, is chief of these “evil spirits.” Other traditions (e.g., YS VY, remez 601, CJ 50:8) explain Sammael was wicked because he was so excited (like a man awaiting a wedding feast) to put the righteous (Moses) to death (Ps. 37:32). Since there was no one as righteous as Moses, that makes no one as evil as Sammael. The notion of the human being struggling with the Angel of Death is a universal folkloristic motif.

and wept,¹⁵⁰ while Sammael cheered and shouted, Michael ס"ם הרשע שהיה מצפה למיתת
 said to him, "Evil one! I am crying and you are rejoicing!" משה הרים קולו ובכה, והיה ס"ם
 Some say that he said to them, "*Do not rejoice over me, O שמח וצוחק, א"ל מיכאל, רשע!*
my enemy! Though I have fallen, I shall rise again; [though אני בוכה ואתה צוחק! ויש
I sit in darkness, the Eternal is my light] (Mic. 7:8).¹⁵¹ *I אומרים שאמר לו הפסוק אל*
have fallen (ibid.) along with Moses, yet *I will rise again תשמחי אויבתי לי כי נפלתי*
 (ibid.) through the greatness of Joshua, when thirty-one קמתי, נפלתי במשה וקמתי
 kings will fall through him.¹⁵² *When I will sit in darkness בגדולתו של יהושע, בשעה*
 (ibid.) refers to the destruction of the first and second שנפלו בידו ל"א מלכים. כי אשב

150. *he raised his voice and wept* This exchange between Sammael and Michael is represented in many traditions (e.g., DeutR 11:10, YS VY, remez 601, CJ 50:8) and represents the responses of good and evil. Other traditions (DeutR 11:10, pg. 183 note 2) explain that Michael is one of the angels who saves people. So, he weeps at the death of Moses.

151. *Though I have fallen, I shall rise again* The citation from Micah appears to reflect what might have been the response of the Israelite people upon the loss of Moses, but also anticipates their eventual rise with Joshua. The point is that all is possible by having faith in God.

152. *thirty-one kings will fall* Reference to Josh. 12:1ff which describes the thirty-one kings who are defeated by the Israelites as they take possession of the Land of Israel.

temples, yet God will be a light to me¹⁵³ (ibid.) in the days of the Messiah.”
 בחשך זה חורבן בית ראשון ובית שני, ה' אור לי בימות המשיח.

7.7 ONE HOUR LEFT

7.7.1 MOSES ASKS OTHERS FOR HELP

By now another hour passed and a Voice from Heaven came out and said to [Moses], “You have only one hour left in this world.” [Moses] said to [God], “Master of the Universe, permit me to fly like a bird¹⁵⁴ that flies in the four directions of the world and gathers its food from the ground and drinks water from rivers and in the evening

ע"כ עלתה לו שעה אחת יצתה ב"ק ואמרה לו אין לך חיים בעוה"ז אלא שעה אחת, א"ל רבש"ע הנה אותך ואפרה כעוף הפורה בד' רוחות העולם ומלקט מזונותיו על הארץ ושותה מים מהנהרות ולערב חוזר

153. *God will be a light to me* No matter how dark it appears to be, whether it is dark because a great leader like Moses has died, or because the Temple was destroyed, there will always be a light of hope provided by God. The Jewish People will be restored. See parallels in DeutR 11:10 and YS VY, remez 601.

154. *fly like a bird* Like in Section 7.4, Moses asks to be turned into a bird to fly through the world. In contrast to the previous request, here Moses appears to be more concerned with living than entering the Land of Israel (LotJN 907). In addition, other traditions (e.g., CJ 50:9, YS VY, remez 602) explain that Moses also requested to be turned into a “beast of the field.” The idea that Moses, the hero, is transformed into a bird, a fish, or other animals, is part of universal folkloristic motifs.

returns to the nest.¹⁵⁵ The Holy One, Blessed be He, said לקנו, א"ל הקב"ה רב לך. א"ל
 to him, "Let it suffice you (Deut. 3:26)." [Moses] said to רבש"ע הצור תמים פעלו!
 [God], "Master of the Universe, [He is] *The Rock, His*
work is perfect (Deut. 32:4)!"¹⁵⁶

And [Moses] cried out weeping and said, "To whom shall ונתן קולו בבכי ובכה ואמר למי
 I go who might ask for mercy for me?" He went to every אלך שיבקש עלי רחמים, הלך לכל
 work of creation,¹⁵⁷ and said to them, "Ask for mercy for מעשי בראשית ואמר להם בקשו
 me." They said to him, "We cannot even ask for mercy עלי רחמים, אמרו לו על עצמנו אין
 for ourselves,¹⁵⁸ as it is written, *He brings everything to* אנו יכולים לבקש רחמים ככתוב את

155. *the nest* This seems to be a reference to God, or Moses' final resting place; almost as if Moses is asking for the ability to see the world, even if every evening he must return to God's heavenly abode.

156. *The Rock, His work is perfect* This quote continues, "All His ways are just." Moses appears to finally accept that God is done listening to his prayers.

157. *every work of creation* MidrPM truncates this tradition in which Moses goes to every element of creation to ask them to pray to God on his behalf (since God has denied all of Moses' prayers). These other traditions were cited in Section 4.

158. *mercy for ourselves* The rest of creation admits that they can't even ask for mercy from death for themselves because in the end, there is no antidote to death. MidrPM

pass precisely at its time (Ecc. 3:11) and in the end, *All* הכל עשה יפה בעתו ולבסוף כתיב
go to the same place (Ecc. 3:20), and it is written¹⁵⁹, הכל הולך אל מקום אחד, וכתיב כי
Though the heavens shall vanish like smoke, and the שמים כעשן נמלחו והארץ כבגד
earth shall wear out like a garment (Isa. 51:6); for others תבלה, על אחרים עאכו"כ.
all the more so.¹⁶⁰

underscores this point with the quote from Ecc. 3:20, explaining that all life and death is in the hands of God.

159. *All go to the same place* The verse continues, “both came from dust and both return to dust,” emphasizing the point that in the end, all creation is equal.

160. *heavens shall vanish ... the earth shall wear out* Even though all creation will die, the one thing that will remain forever is The Eternal. Death is the separator between God and all else. MidrPM does not use this quote from Isaiah to emphasize the darkness of death, but rather the eternal light, hope, and comfort, of a God who remains for eternity, as seen from the rest of the Isaiah verse: “My triumph shall endure forever, My salvation through all the ages.” See parallel in BT AZ 17a.

7.7.2 MOSES AND GOD PREPARE JOSHUA

When Moses saw that he could not escape death, he called out to Joshua in the presence of Israel¹⁶¹, and said to him, "Behold, my son, all of this people are God's people; I give them to [your care]. Their babies are yet untaught of the commandments;¹⁶² be careful with them, that you not say anything to them that is not fitting,¹⁶³ for they are the children of The Holy One, Blessed be He, who called them, 'My firstborn son Israel (Ex. 4:22),' and who loves them more than all nations."

כיון שראה משה שאינו יכול להמלט מהמיתה קרא ליהושע בפני כל ישראל ואמר לו בני! ראה את כל העם הזה עם ה' אני מוסר לך, ותינוקותיהם שעדיין לא התעסקו במצות הזהר בהם, שלא תאמר להם דבר שאינו הגון, שהם בניו של הקב"ה וקראם בני בכורי ישראל, ואהבם מכל אומה.

161. *in the presence of Israel* The transfer of leadership is a public event. All of Israel must see that Moses is willingly giving over leadership to Joshua, otherwise they may not believe it ever happened.

162. *babies are yet untaught* Moses is more concerned with the new generation, the generation who never will have learned Torah from him. Josephus (Jos 48) explains that the old grieved because they knew they were losing a careful protector and the young grieved because they would never taste all of Moses' virtue. See the parallel in SD 305.

163. *not fitting* Most likely, Moses is warning Joshua not to chastise and be too hard on the new generation of Israel, like he was in the desert.

At the same hour, God said to Joshua, "Joshua! Moses, your teacher, placed you in his stead. Take a rod and hit the head of those who refuse to listen to you.¹⁶⁴ *Do not withhold discipline from a child* (Prov. 23:13), *Israel is still a child and I love him* (Hos. 11:1). Joshua said [to Moses], "Moses, my teacher, what will become of me? If I give to them property on the mountain, they will say, "Give us [property] in the plain."¹⁶⁵ Moses, our teacher, peace be upon him, said to [Joshua], "Don't fear, because The Holy One, Blessed be He, promised me that there will be peace in the distribution of the land. [Moses] said

באותה שעה אמר הקב"ה ליהושע, יהושע! משה רבך הניחך ואתה הוא במקומו, טול מקל והך על קדקוד של הממאן לשמוע אליך, אל תמנע מנער מוסר, כי נער ישראל ואוהבהו. אמר יהושע משה רבי מה תהי עלי, שמא אתן להם נחלה בהר והם אומרים תן לנו בשפלה, א"ל מרע"ה אל תירא כי הקב"ה הבטיחני שישים שלום בחלוק הארץ, א"ל משה כל ספקות שיש

164. *hit the head* Contrary to Moses' advice, it is likely God wants Joshua to behave like Moses did before him (LotJ pg. 451); ruling with a strong arm and chastising those that do not listen. The quote from Prov. 23:13 clearly supports God's request when read in full, "Do not withhold discipline from a child; If you beat him with a rod, he will not die" (NJPS). And read in conjunction with Hos. 11:1, Joshua is made to infer that all of Israel is a child, not just the infants, and should be treated as such. But, God wants Joshua to know that showing authority comes out of love.

165. *give us [property] in the plain* This refers to the distribution of the land of Israel to the twelve tribes. Joshua is worried that there may be arguments about who receives which part of the land which might result in inter-tribal strife or even war.

to him, "Any doubts that you have [with respect to the law], ask questions of me now. For I shall be taken from you and you will not see me again." [Joshua] said to him, "My teacher, when have I left you,¹⁶⁶ whether by day or by night, that I would make a mistake?" Because he didn't ask, he forgot three-thousand lighter and serious laws, and all doubts were solved in the house of study of Jabetz. [Moses] said to [Joshua], "Even though you have no doubts to ask [about], come and I will kiss you." [Joshua] went to him and [Moses] kissed him and cried on his neck and blessed him a second time, "May you be at peace with Israel." They never found contentment with me, since I rebuked and admonished them [constantly].¹⁶⁷

לך לשאול שאל ממני עתה שאני
ניטל ממך ולא תראני עוד, א"ל רבי
היכן הנחתיך בין ביום ובין בלילה
שיש לי לטעות? ומפני שלא שאל
אז נשתכחו ממנו ג' אלפים הלכות
קלות וחמורות, ובבית מדרשו של
יעבץ התירו כל הספקות. א"ל אע"פ
שאין לך ספקות לשאול בא
ואנשקך, הלך אליו ונשקו ובכה על
צוארו וברכו שנית היותך בשלום
עם ישראל, כי עמדי לא מצאו
קורות רוח מעולם מפני ההזהרות
ותוכחות שהייתי מוכיחם.

166. *have I left you* Joshua has always been at Moses' side and therefore should have learned everything there is to know about the law. This follows a tradition (BT Ber 62a) about students who follow their teachers everywhere (even into the bathroom and in the bedroom) to learn Torah.

167. *I rebuked and admonished them [constantly]* Moses gets in the last word about how Joshua should treat Israel. This sentence seems to appear for the first time here in MidrPM. The point is that if Joshua is to be liked as a leader, he needs to administer justice with more love than Moses did.

7.7.3 MOSES AND THE PEOPLE APOLOGIZE TO EACH OTHER

Moses began to bless each tribe individually,¹⁶⁸ When he התחיל משה לברך כל שבט ושבט
saw that his time [left in his life] was short, he included בפני עצמו, כיון שראה שקצרה
them all in a single blessing and said, "I have troubled you שעתו כללם בברכה אחת וא"ל
[with regard to the difficulty] of the Torah and הרבה צערתי אתכם בתורה
Commandments. Forgive me."¹⁶⁹ They said, "Our teacher, ומצות, מחלו לי. א"ל רבינו
our master, we forgive you. We, too, caused you great אדונינו מחול לך, גם אנחנו הרבה
anger and increased the burdens upon you. Pardon us." [עמוד 367]
Moses said to them, "It is forgiven." עליך טורח מחול לנו, א"ל מחול
הוא לכם.

They came and said to [Moses], "The hour that you will באו ואמרו לו הגיע השעה שאתה
depart from this world has arrived. [Moses] said, "Blessed נפטר מהעולם, אמר ברוך שם חי
is His Name, who lives and endures forever!" Moses said וקיים לעולם! אמר משה לישראל
to Israel, "Please, when you enter the Land of Israel בבקשה מכם כשתכנסו לא"י זכרו

168. *bless each tribe individually* Many traditions (e.g., Jos 48, MidrTan VE 6, MidrPss 90:3, CJ 51:7) mention Moses' individual blessing for each tribe, as he does in the Bible (Deut. 33:1ff). However, few give details on what the blessings were specifically (LotJ pg. 455ff).

169. *Forgive me* At the end of life, it is Jewish tradition to say a final *viddui* (confessional), asking God to forgive all sins. But, here, Moses asks the people Israel for forgiveness, seeking a final reconciliation with them.

remember me and my bones, and say, ‘Woe to him, the son of Amram who ran before us like a horse¹⁷⁰ and whose bones fell in the desert.’”¹⁷¹ Israel said to [Moses], “Our teacher, if you leave us, what will become of us?” He said to them, “When I was with you, The Holy One, Blessed be He, was with you. Yet, do not say that all the miracles and the wonders that were done by me were done for my sake. No, they were only done for your sake and out of His mercy and kindness. And if you will put your trust in God,¹⁷² then surely God will work your desires.” Israel opened [their mouths] and said, “The Eternal is our God

אותי ואת עצמותי ואמרו אי לו
לבן עמרם שרץ לפנינו כסוס ונפלו
עצמותיו במדבר. אמרו לו ישראל
רבינו אם אתה פורש ממנו מה יהא
עלינו, אמר להם כשהייתי עמכם
היה הקב"ה עמכם, שמא תאמרו
כל הנסים והנפלאות שנעשו על
ידי בשבילי היו? לא נעשו אלא
בשבילכם ובעבור רחמי וחסדיו,
ואם יהיה בטחונכם עליו ודאי
יעשה חפצכם. פתחו ישראל ואמרו

170. *like a horse* See Section 3.3 for the meaning of the idiom. Interestingly, in the other usage of the idiom, Moses seeks reward for “running before Israel like a horse.” He receives no such reward, but in the end, Israel acknowledges Moses’ hard work.

171. *whose bones fell in the desert* See Section 7.4 for reasons why Moses’ bones were not permitted to enter the Land of Israel. See parallels in MidrTan VE 6 and DeutR VE 8.

172. *put your trust in God* The theme of trusting God and God’s eternality is repeated here. The Israelites, only ever having trusted Moses’ execution of God’s will, are rightly nervous about his impending death. In other traditions (LotJ pg. 464), Moses warns Israel about trusting princes or any man, because all creations can die. The point is that Israel must trust in the Eternal and everlasting.

ה' הוא האלהים ה' הוא האלהים, (Deut. 4:35), *The Eternal is our God; God is our shelter* and strength (Ps. 46:2).¹⁷³ אלהים לנו מחסה ועוז.

7.8 HALF HOUR LEFT: MOSES BIDS FAREWELL

יצתה ב"ק ואמרה משה למה תצער, A Voice from Heaven called out and said, "Moses, why do you trouble yourself so? You only have only a half hour more of life." When [Moses] saw the attribute of mercy in the world and the acts of salvation and consolation that in the future,¹⁷⁴ The Holy One, Blessed be He, would perform for Israel, he said to [Israel], "*Happy are you, Israel, who is like you, a* לישאל מי כמוך עם נושע בה', ועמד וברכם בשלום, ונתן קולו ובכה ואמר לישאל בשלום אראה אתכם לתחיית

173. *The Eternal is our God... and strength* These two verses articulate Israel's response to Moses request. With Deut. 4:35, Israel affirms God's "oneness" validating God, even over Moses, and Ps. 46:2 affirms God's strength even amidst the turmoil the Israelites are in.

174. *salvation and consolation that in the future* There are traditions (PSPH 19:10ff, TY 34, LotJ pg. 443) that when God shows Moses the Land of Israel, God also shows him the entire history of time, everything from Creation to the Day of Judgment, when the resurrection of the dead will occur. Therefore, Moses sees the glory of King David, the destruction of the Temple, and the exile of the Jews. But, Moses also sees the coming of the Messiah and Paradise filled with the righteous.

המתים, ויצא מלפניהם בבכיה גדולה, And he ¹⁷⁵ *people be saved by God* (Deut. 33:29).” And he stood up and he bade them farewell, and raised his וגם ישראל בכו וזעקו זעקה גדולה ומרה, voice weeping, and said to Israel, “In peace I will see you at the resurrection of the dead.” Then he left them in great weeping. Israel also wept and cried bitterly.

ועמד משה וקרע את חלוקו ונטל מעילו And Moses stood and tore his shirt and took his coat וכסה את ראשו כאבל, ונכנס לתוך and covered his head like a mourner, and entered his tent and cried and said, “Woe to my feet that will not אהלו והיה בוכה ואומר אוי לרגלי שלא דרכו בא"י, אוי לידי שלא קטפו enter the Land of Israel. Woe to my hands that will not מזמרותיה, אוי לגרוני שלא אכל מפירות ארץ זבת חלב ודבש. ¹⁷⁶ pluck its fruits. Woe to my throat that will not eat the fruit of the land of milk and honey.”

175. *saved by God* This quote from Deut. 33:29 appears to be used by Moses to prove that in the future, Israel will be saved by God. In this case, the “saving” is the resurrection of the dead in the messianic era.

176. *Woe to my feet...Woe to my hands... Woe to my throat* Some traditions (LotJN 942) explain that Moses’ supplications to enter the Land of Israel were not so he could derive earthly pleasures, but to be in a position to fulfill the commandments, which one can only fulfil in the Land of Israel. However, this does not seem to be the case here. Here, Moses’ lament appears to be about the specific earthly pleasures he will not enjoy in the Land of Israel. Similarly, see BT Sota 14a.

7.9 A MOMENT AND A HALF LEFT

7.9.1 MOSES CONVEYS TEACHING TO JOSHUA

A Voice from Heaven came out and said to Moses, “You only have a moment and a half to live.” What did Moses do? He took a scroll in his hand and wrote on it the Ineffable Name and Sefer ha-Yashar.¹⁷⁷ And Moses then went to the tent of Joshua to deliver to him the scroll. Joshua was sitting and expounding [the law]. And Moses stood while Joshua sat.¹⁷⁸ [Moses] stood, bowed and he rested his hand on his head without being seen by Joshua,

יצתה ב"ק ואמרה למשה אין לך
חיים אלא רגע אחד ומחצה, מה
עשה משה נטל את המגילה בידו
וכתב עליה שם המפורש וספר
הישר, והלך משה לאהלו של
יהושע למסור לו המגילה, והיה
יהושע יושב ודורש, משה מעומד
ויהושע מיושב וכפף קומתו והניח
ידו על ראשו ונתעלמו עיניו של
יהושע ולא היה רואהו כדי
שימאס נפשו. הלכו ישראל אצל

177. *Sefer ha-Yashar* Literally, “Book of the Upright.” The name of this scroll is used by the 12th – 13th C narrative midrash of the same name which covers the history of Israel from the time of Adam and Eve through the Judges. It is also possible that this scroll should be called “The Book of Song” (*Sefer ha-Shir*) reflecting the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-43). Perhaps the confusion is due to a scribal error which confused שיר, “song,” with ישר “upright” (LotJN 943). See parallel in YA VY, remez 602.

178. *Moses stood while Joshua sat* For the rabbis and their students, the position of honor was sitting; the teacher would sit while the students stood.

so that his soul would be repulsed.¹⁷⁹ [Meanwhile,] Israel משה לאהלו ואמרו היכן מרע"ה,
 went to Moses's tent and said, "Where is Moses, our אמרו להם בפתחו של יהושע,
 teacher, peace be upon him? " They said to them, "At the הלכו ומצאוהו שהיה עומד
 tent of Joshua." They went and they found him [Moses], ויהושע יושב, אמרו ליהושע מה
 was standing while Joshua [was] sitting, and they said to עלה על לבך שמשה עומד ואתה
 Joshua, "What were you thinking that Moses is standing יושב, כיון שראהו יהושע מעומד
 and you are sitting?!" When Joshua saw [Moses], standing, צעק ואמר רבי רבי אבי אבי למה
 he cried out and said, "My teacher, my teacher! My father, אתה מעניש אותי, אמרו לו
 my father! Why do you inflict God's punishment on me?"¹⁸⁰ ישראל רבינו למדנו תורה, א"ל
 Israel said to [Moses], "Our teacher, teach us Torah." אין לי רשות, א"ל אין אנו מניחים

179. *soul would be repulsed* Similar to the idea in Section 3.2 where Moses says, "Better on-hundred deaths than a single envy." It is as if Moses is acting so as not to become jealous and therefore be ready to die. Similarly, another tradition (MidTan VE 6) explains that Moses reduced his stature and placed his hand on his mouth, all signs of purposefully humbling oneself before another.

180. *Why do you inflict God's punishment on me?* Similar to Section 7.2.5, Joshua is embarrassed when Moses acts as his student. It is unclear exactly what "God's punishment" is, but it seems that Israel chastises Joshua for allowing their teacher Moses to occupy a subservient position to Joshua. In a different tradition (MidTan VE 6), rather than ask about "God's punishment," Joshua rends his cloths and begins crying, as if to acknowledge that the transfer of power means that Moses is about to die.

[Moses] said, "I have no permission [to do so]."¹⁸¹ They
 said to him, "We will not leave you [alone]." A Voice from
 Heaven came out and said, "Learn from Joshua, who
 received the Torah from Moses."¹⁸² And then Joshua sat at
 the head.

7.9.2 MOSES LOSES HIS ABILITY TO TEACH

Rav Shmuel bar Nahmani said in the name of R. Yohanan:
 When Joshua said, "Blessed is the One who chose the
 ברוך שבחר בצדיקים נטלו
 אוצרות החכמה ונתנו
 ליהושע, ולא היה יודע משה

181. *I have no permission [to do so]* Despite the fact that Moses knows that he must transfer not only the leadership, but also the teaching of Torah to Joshua, the people of Israel cannot see Joshua as their teacher while Moses is still alive. Moses tries to tell the people that God has removed his authority to teach, but still they will not listen. At this moment, the position of Moses amongst the people supersedes God's desire.

182. *Learn from Joshua, who received the Torah from Moses* It takes nothing less than the voice of God to convince the people to believe in the leadership of Joshua. And even then, God has to validate Joshua by explaining that he learned Torah from Moses. The greatness of the figure of Moses in the eyes of the people of Israel cannot be understated in this moment.

righteous,” the treasures of wisdom¹⁸³ [were taken away from
 him] and given to Joshua, and Moses didn't know what Joshua
 was saying. After Joshua [finished], Israel said to [Moses],
 “Summarize the Torah for us.” He said to them, “I don't know
 how to answer you.”¹⁸⁴ And Moses wrote [the Torah] in tears
 and Joshua filled it in after him. At that very moment, Moses
 אמר משה רבש"ע עד עכשיו

183. *treasures of wisdom* This refers to the teachings of Moses which God took away from Moses and gave to Joshua. Another tradition (MidrTan VE 6) reads, “Blessed be the One who has chosen the righteous and their Mishnaic teaching. They took the traditions of wisdom from Moses and gave them to Joshua.” This reading suggests that the blessing is in fact a blessing for rabbinic teaching, interpreting Torah. The rabbis seem to treat Joshua as a prototypic “rabbi” who receives the wisdom from Moses and begins the rabbinic tradition of Mishnaic teaching. This fits the Chain of Tradition in PA.

184. *I don't know how to answer you* There are two possible ways to read Moses' answer. The first is that since Moses had passed all his power and his teaching to Joshua, he has lost his ability to teach Torah. The second is that this might reflect a tradition (BT Men 29b) in which Moses is situated in the classroom of R. Akiva and doesn't understand anything. In this way, as soon as Moses passed the teaching over to Joshua and Joshua began to expound the Torah in his unique way, Moses was unable to understand.

said, "Master of the Universe, until now I have asked for life, בקשתי חיים ועכשיו הרי
but now, behold my soul is surrendered to You."¹⁸⁵ נפשי נתונה בידך.

7.9.3 SAMMAEL TRIES TO TAKE MOSES' SOUL

When [Moses'] soul was at peace with dying, The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Michael and Gabriel,¹⁸⁶ "Go out and bring me the soul of Moses." Gabriel said, "One who is equal to sixty thousand, how can I presume to take his soul from him and be so arrogant in his presence?" Afterwards, [God] said [the same] to Michael, [and] he

כיון שהשלים נפשו למות, אמר הקב"ה למיכאל וגבריאל צאו והביאו לי נשמתו של משה, אמר גבריאל מי ששקול כנגד ששים רבוא היאך אני יכול ליטול נשמתו ולהיות חצוף לפניו. אח"כ אמר למיכאל כך ובכה מיכאל ואמר לו לזנגזיאל כך, אמר לפניו רבש"ע אני הייתי רבו והוא תלמידי איך אטול נשמתו, אח"כ אמר לס"ם ליטול נשמתו, מיד

185. *my soul is surrendered to You* As soon as Moses realizes that he can no longer teach Torah, he no longer desires to live. Similar to the previous section, this might also have to do with his jealousy of Joshua and preferring to die rather than live in jealousy of him (LotJ pg. 466).

186. *Gabriel* According to Louis Ginzberg (LotJN 946), Gabriel is one of the six angels of death. More specifically, Gabriel is the angel whose task it is to take the life of kings. Therefore, the text probably should read "[God] said to Gabriel."

wept.¹⁸⁷ Then [God] said the same to Zagzagel.¹⁸⁸ He said יצא בשמחה גדולה מלפני
 to [God], “Master of the Universe, I was his teacher and he הקב"ה, ולבש חרבו וחגר
 was my student;¹⁸⁹ how can I take his soul?” After that, אכזריות והלך לפני משה בחימה
 [God] told Sammael to take his soul.¹⁹⁰ Immediately, גדולה, כיון שנסתכל בו והוא היה
 [Sammael] went out in great joy from the Holy One, כותב שם המפורש וזקוקין של
 Blessed be He. He put on his sword and girded himself with אש יוצאין מפיו וזוהר פניו
 ruthlessness and went before Moses in great rage. When ומאמרו מבהיקים כשמש ודומה
 [Sammael] looked upon [Moses], who was writing the למלאך ה' צבאות, היה ס"ם
 Ineffable Name and sparks of fire were [shooting] from his מתירא ומזדעזע ממנו, וכשהרים

187. *Michael, [and] he wept* This appears to reference the same tradition from Section 7.6 where Michael chastises Sammael for being joyful upon the Moses' death.

188. *Zagzagel* It is likely that Zagzagel is the same as Metatron, “the prince of heavenly prices” (LotJN 898).

189. *I was his teacher and he was my student* As referred to in Section 7.2.5, there is a tradition that Zagzagel taught the secrets of the Torah to Moses.

190. *Sammael to take his soul* There is an old tradition (Charles, The Assumption of Moses, LotJN 946) in which Michael and *Satan* (Sammael) argue about the right to bury Moses' body. *Satan* argues that everything corporeal belongs to him. In the end, Michael succeeds so that Moses' body is not delivered into the hands of *Satan*. Perhaps more interesting is that the rabbis change Moses' body to his soul, a non-corporeal entity, and here add the fact that God requests Sammael to retrieve Moses' soul.

mouth and the radiance of his countenance and his speech משה עיניו וראה ס"ם ומשה ידע
 was shining like the sun, and he was similar to an angel of שבא אליו, מיד חשכו עיניו של
 the God of Hosts, Sammael was afraid of and shaken by ס"ם מזיו של משה ונפל על פניו
 him. When Moses lifted his eyes and saw Sammael – ואחזהו חיל כיולדה ולא יכול
 Moses knew that he was coming for him – immediately לדבר בפיו עד שפתח משה פיו
 Sammael's eyes grew dim from the radiance of Moses and תחלה לאמר: ס"ם ס"ם, אין
 he fell on his face. And fear took hold of him like a woman שלום אמר ה' לרשעים, למה אתה
 giving birth and he could not speak until Moses opened his עומד לנגדי, א"ל הגיע זמנך
 mouth first, saying, "Sammael, Sammael! God said, "*There* ליפטר מן העולם תן לי נשמתך,
is no peace for the wicked (Isa. 57:21)." Why do you stand א"ל מי שלחך אלי? א"ל מי
 opposite me?" [Sammael] said to him, "Your time has שברא העולם והנשמות ובידי
 arrived to depart this world. Give me your soul." [Moses] נמסרו כל הנשמות משנברא
 said to him, "Who sent you to me?" Sammael said to him, העולם, א"ל משה יש בי כח יותר
 "The One who created the world and the souls. All the souls מכל באי עולם שיצאתי מהול
 that were created, since the creation of world, were ממעי אמי וביום שנולדתי דברתי
 delivered into my hand." [Moses] said to him, "I have more לאבי ולאמי, אפילו משדי אמי לא
 strength than all who come into the world.¹⁹¹ I came out of ינקתי אלא בשכר, ובשלש שנים

191. *more strength than all who come into the world* This reflects the greatness of Moses which was expanded upon in Sections 3.3 and 5.3 which explain that Moses' righteousness is greater than all who came before him. Here we see the universal motif of the hero struggling with the Angel of Death. See also several parallels to our midrash in this regard, e.g., DuetR 11:10.

my mother's womb circumcised¹⁹² and on the day that I was נתנבאתי שהייתי עתיד לקבל את
 born I spoke to my father and mother; I didn't even suckle התורה, ונטלתי כתר פרעה מעל
 from the breast of my mother until she received her pay ראשו, ובן שמונים שנה עשיתי
 [from Pharaoh]; and when I was 3 years I prophesied¹⁹³ that אותות ומופתים והוצאתי ששים
 in my future I would receive the Torah; and I removed רבוא ממצרים, וקרעתי להם ביים
 Pharaoh's crown from his head. When I was 80 years I י"ב שבילין, והפכתי מי מרה
 performed signs and wonders and I brought 600,000 למתוק, ופסלתי לוחות אבנים
 [people] out from Egypt; and I split the sea in twelve paths ועליתי לרקיע, והייתי תופס
 for them; and I turned the bitter waters, sweet;¹⁹⁴ and I במלחמה וקבלתי חיציהם בענן,
 hewed the tablets of stone, and I ascended to the firmament; ודברתי פנים בפנים עם אדון
 I engaged in battle [with the angels]¹⁹⁵ and I absorbed their העולם, ונצחתי פמליא של מעלה
 arrows in the cloud; and I spoke face to face with the Master וקבלתי התורה וכתבתי מפי
 of the Universe; and defeated the heavenly family. I הקב"ה תרי"ג מצות ולימדתי

192. *circumcised* See the many parallel traditions of Moses being circumcised, e.g., BT Sota 12b and ExR 1:20.

193. *I prophesied* Similarly, BT Sot 12b and ExR 1:20.

194. *bitter waters, sweet* Referring to the waters of Meribah (Num. 20:1ff).

195. *battle [with the angels]* There is a tradition (see ARNB pg. 150 note 12) that when Moses ascended Mt. Sinai, he entered heaven and had to battle the angels in order to receive Torah. See also BT Shab 88b, and ExR 28:1 regarding Moses in battle with the angels.

received the Torah and wrote, from the mouth of The Holy One, Blessed be He, the 613 commandments and taught them to the children of Israel. I made war with the two kings,¹⁹⁶ [who were] the descendants of giants (Sihon and Og),¹⁹⁷ [who were so tall that] during the flood, the waters did not [even] reach their ankles. I made the sun and moon stand still on high. Is there in the world a hero like me? Evil one, flee from me! When Sammael saw the shining and pure soul of Moses, he fled.¹⁹⁸

את בני ישראל, ועשיתי מלחמה עם ב' מלכים ילידי הענק (סיחון ועוג) שבשעת המבול לא הגיע המים לקרסוליהם, והעמדתי חמה ולבנה ברום עולם, וכי יש בעולם גבור כמוני? רשע ברח מלפני! כיון שראה ס"ם נשמתו של משה תמה וברה ברח,

196. war with the two kings Not only did Moses “make war” with Sihon and Og, another tradition (CJ 50:12) explains that Moses killed them with his staff – the same one he was holding as he spoke to Sammael. This is most likely the same staff upon which is inscribed the “Ineffable Name.”

197. Sihon and Og Reference to Num. 21:21ff. The Amalekites are mentioned in Deut. 2:1.

198. he fled Sammael could not handle the greatness of Moses’ soul. His soul was not like any other human soul; it was more like a heavenly being. This idea reflects the question posed earlier of whether Moses is “God or man?” Apparently, he is not God because he is dying, but he is also not man, since Sammael cannot remove his soul.

7.10 A MOMENT LEFT: SAMMAEL TRIES AGAIN

A Voice from Heaven came out and said, “[Moses] do not cause pain for yourself; you only have but a moment left in your life in this world.” Sammael returned to The Holy One, Blessed be He. The Holy One, Blessed be He, asked him, “Where is the soul of Moses; what have you brought?” Sammael said to [God], “Master of the Universe, if you ask me to turn Gehinnom from to the uppermost level to undermost,¹⁹⁹ I can make that change. But [as to] the son of Amram, I cannot prevail against him. I am even unable to stand before him because the light on his countenance is like the light of Seraphim of the Chariot and the sparks of the fire that shoot forth from his mouth, and furthermore, the radiance of his countenance is similar to the Shekhinah.²⁰⁰ Please don't send me to him because I

יצתה ב"ק ואמרה אל תצער עצמך
אין לך חיים בעולם אלא רגע, חזר
ס"ם לפני הקב"ה, א"ל הקב"ה
היכן היא נשמתו של משה, מה
הבאת? א"ל ס"ם רבש"ע אם אתה
אומר לי להפוך גיהנם ממדרגה
עליונה לתחתונה יכול אני להפוך,
ובן עמרם איני יכול לו, ואפילו
לעמוד לפניו איני יכול שאור פניו
דומה לשרפי מרכבה וזקוקין של
אש יוצאין מפיו, ולא עוד אלא
שזיו פניו דומה לשכינה, בבקשה
ממך אל תשלחני אליו שאיני יכול
לעמוד בפניו. א"ל הקב"ה רשע

199. *uppermost level to undermost* This statement suggests that, perhaps unlike the Christian idea of Hell being below the earth, Gehinnom appears to be above with heaven.

200. *his countenance is similar to the Shekhinah* Though Moses is not God, he appears to have many qualities of God; he even appears to be greater than the angels, since they cannot take his soul. In comparison to the DeutR version, here we see an extended conversation between God and Sammael.

cannot stand before him.” The Holy One, Blessed be He, מאש של גיהנם נבראת ולאש של
 said to him, “Evil one, from the fire of Gehinnom you גיהנם אתה חוזר, בתחלה יצאת
 were created, and to the fire of Gehinnom you will return. מלפני בשמחה גדולה וכשראית
 Initially, you went from Me in great joy, but when you saw גדולתו חזרת בבושתך, לך והביא
 [Moses’] greatness, you returned in shame. Go and bring נשמתו. מה עשה ס"ם באותה שעה
 me his soul.” What then did Sammael do? He drew his שלף חרבו מתערה ובא לפני משה
 sword from its the sheath and came before Moses with ע"ה בחמה וקצף, נטל משה מטה
 anger and wrath.²⁰¹ [Moses] took hold the staff of God, האלהים בידו שהיה חקוק בו שם
 upon which was engraved with the Ineffable Name, and המפורש ופגע בס"ם וגער בו
 struck Sammael and rebuked him until he ran and fled בגערה עד שרץ וברח מלפניו, ורץ
 from before him. And Moses ran after him with the משה אחריו בשם המפורש ותפס
 Ineffable Name and caught him and struck him with the אותו והכהו במטה ועור עיניו
 staff and blinded his eyes with his rays of glory.²⁰² מקרני הודו.

201. *came before Moses with anger and wrath* In a different tradition (SD 305), when Sammael returns to find Moses, Moses is nowhere to be found. Sammael asks all of creation, the sea, the mountains, Gehenna, the angels, and humans, but Moses is gone.

202. *struck him with the staff and blinded his eyes* In the parallel versions, Moses drives Sammael away by simply mentioning The Ineffable Name (DeutR 11:5 and ExR 47:6). In general folklore, we see the motif of the “Devil” fleeing at the mention of God’s name as well as the hero blinding the devil.

7.11 MOSES' TIME IS UP

7.11.1 MOSES PRAYS FOR GOD TO TAKE HIM

In the meantime, a half a moment had passed, A Heavenly עדיין עלתה לו חצי רגע יצתה
Voice came out and said to him, "Moses why do you ב"ק ואמרה לו משה למה תצער
trouble yourself so? The last hour has come to an end." עצמך הגיע סוף השעה, עמד משה
Moses stood in prayer and said, "Master of the Universe, בתפלה ואמר רבש"ע זכור
remember when you revealed Yourself to me in the bush; שנגלית אלי בסנה, זכור [עמוד
remember that you made me ascend to the firmament and I 368] שהעלית אותי לרקיע ולא
did not eat or drink for forty days and nights?²⁰³ You אכלתי ולא שתיתי ארבעים יום
Compassionate and Merciful [One], do not deliver me into וארבעים לילה, רחום וחנן אל
the hand of Sammael." The Holy One, Blessed be He, said, תמסרני ביד ס"ם, אמר הקב"ה
"I have accepted your prayer; I Myself will attend [to you] קבלתי תפלתך, אני בעצמי אטפל
and I will bury you."²⁰⁴ Immediately [Moses] sanctified ואקבור אותך, מיד קדש עצמו
himself like the Seraphim that are part of God's majesty. כשרפי ההוד ונגלה הקב"ה משמי

203. *forty days and nights* The point here is that Moses is different from other mortals; like God he does not need food and drink. Additionally, another tradition (MidPss 90:6) explains that an ordinary man will stand and pray for two hours, an exceedingly righteous man will stand and pray for a day, but Moses stood and prayed for those forty days and nights. In that same tradition, God likens Moses to the angels.

204. *I will bury you* God's burying Moses was mentioned at the outset of MidrPM in relationship to Joseph's bones.

And The Holy One, Blessed be He, revealed [Godself] מרום העליונים לקבל נשמתו של
 from the highest heaven to receive the soul of Moses, our מרע"ה. כיון שראה משה
 teacher, peace be upon him. When Moses saw the Holy להקב"ה נפל על פניו ואמר
 One, Blessed be He, he fell upon his face and said, "Master רבש"ע במדת חסד ובמדת רחמים
 of the Universe, with the attributes of kindness and בראת עולמך ובמדת רחמים אתה
 compassion you created your world. May you treat me with תנהג עמי, א"ל הקב"ה אני אלך
 the attribute of compassion." The Holy One, Blessed be He, לפניך ושלשה מלאכים באו עם
 said to him, "I will go before you."²⁰⁵ And three angels הקב"ה והם מיכאל וזגזאל
 accompanied The Holy One, Blessed be He, and they were וגבריאל, גבריאל הציע מטתו של
 Michael, Zagzagel, and Gabriel.²⁰⁶ Gabriel laid out Moses' משה, מיכאל פירס מילת
 bier, Michael spread a sheet upon it, and Zagzagel laid מראשותיו וזגזאל הניח כלי
 down a wool spread at the foot of the bier. Michael was on מילת במרגלותיו, מיכאל מימינו

205. *I will go before you* God will come down, receive Moses and bury him. In another tradition (LotJ pg. 471), God says to Moses, "Moses, be not afraid. 'Thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.'" This tradition is significant because earlier in Section 6.3, Moses requested a reward from God for his years of leadership. He was not rewarded with extended life or permitted to enter the Land of Israel, but he was rewarded with the "glory of God."

206. *Michael, Zagzagel, and Gabriel* In a separate tradition, (TY on Deut. 34:6) many more angels are involved in the burial. Michael and Gabriel prepare the bier in a fashion to befit a king and Metatron (Zagzagel), Jophiel, Uriel, and Jephphya, laid Moses upon it.

[Moses's] right, and Gabriel was on [Moses's] left.²⁰⁷ The וגבריאל משמאלו, אמר לו
 Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses, "Cross your hands הקב"ה למשה תקף שתי ידיך
 and place them on your chest,²⁰⁸ and close your two eyes." והניחן על החזה, העצם שתי
 And [Moses] did so. עיניך ועשה כן,

7.11.2 GOD TAKES MOSES' SOUL

Immediately, The Holy One, Blessed be He, summoned מיד קרא הקב"ה לנשמתו, א"ל
 [Moses'] soul and said to her: "My daughter, I have allotted בתי מאה ועשרים שנה קצבתי
 to you one hundred and twenty years to reside in the body of שנותיך להיות בגוף הצדיק,
 this righteous one; leave and don't delay, my daughter." The צאי ואל תאחרי בתי. השיבה
 soul replied, "*You are the One who knows, the God of all הנפש אתה הוא היודע ואלהי*
spirits (Num. 16:22) and *in your hands are the souls of every הרוחות ובידך נפש כל חי,*
living thing (Job 12:17). You created me and placed me to בראתני ונתתני להיות בגופו
 abide in the body of this righteous one. Is there a body as של צדיק זה, וכי יש גוף נקי
 clean and pure and holy in the world, as is this [one]? Never וטהור וקדוש בעולם כמו זה
 was a fly seen on see him, and never did leprosy spring [from שמעולם לא נראה זבובים
 עליו, ולא היה צר עין מעולם,
 טוב לי לשבת כאן, אמר לה

207. *Gabriel on [Moses's] left* Omitted here is the tradition (LotJ pg. 472) that God was at Moses' head. This is similar to the tradition (BT Ned 40a) that the Shekhina rests at the head of the bed of the sick.

208. *your chest* MidrTan VE 6 reads "heart."

it].²⁰⁹ It is good for me to reside here [in the body of this man]. הקב"ה אל תאחרי בתי הגיע
 The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to her, "Do not delay my קצץ ואושיבך עמי בכסא כבודי
 daughter, for your end has arrived. I will place you with Me אצל שרפים ואופנים ומלאכים
 on My throne of glory²¹⁰ with the Seraphim, Ofannim, angels, וכרובים. אמרה לפניו רבש"ע
 and Cherubim." But [the soul] said to [God], "Maser of the טוב לשבת בזה הצדיק כי
 Universe, it is good for me to reside in this righteous one. For המלאכים עזא ועזאל ירדו מן
 though the angels Azza and Azazel²¹¹ descended from heaven השמים והשחיתו דרכם ומשה
 and corrupted their ways, but this Moses, who was [made of] זה שהיה בשר ודם מיום
 flesh and blood, from the day You appeared to him in the שנגלית אליו בסנה פירש

209. *leprosy spring [from it]* The Hebrew here צר עין, is unclear. Ginzberg (LotJN 948) says to read it as לא היתה בו צרעת, and translates צרעת as "leprosy," though another tradition (CJ 50:14) translates it as "evil germ." A different tradition (YS VY, remez 604) reads צרעין, "wasps." The point is that Moses' body is pure and clean, more than any other body ever has been.

210. *throne of glory* A different tradition (BT Shab 152b) explains that the souls of the righteous are placed under the throne of glory.

211. *Azza and Azazel* Moses' soul does not want to leave the body of Moses because it is more pure than all other souls. Parallel traditions (CJ 50:15, LotJ pg. 472, YS VY, remez 604) explains that these fallen angels coveted and seduced the daughters of earth and corrupted their ways. As punishment, God suspended these angels between heaven and earth.

bush, he separated himself from his wife.²¹² Let me remain מאשתו, הניחני. כיון שראה
 [where I am]. When The Holy One, Blessed be He, saw this, הקב"ה כך נטל נשמתו בנשיקת
 [God] took [Moses'] soul with a kiss of the mouth,²¹³ as it פה, שנאמר וימת שם משה
 says, *So Moses, the servant of God, died there ... by the עבד ה' על פי ה'.*
mouth of God (Deut. 34:5).²¹⁴

212. *separated himself from his wife* Several traditions (CJ 50:15, DeutR 11:10) cite the incident when Miriam and Aaron speak out against Moses' wife (Num. 12:1ff) as the proof that he neither had a conjugal relationship with Tzipporah once God was revealed to him. See specifically, SN 99 for earliest rabbinic mention of this tradition.

213. *kiss of her mouth* The kiss can represent departure, as Moses kisses Joshua in Section 7.7.2 as a way of saying "goodbye." Additionally, other traditions (BT BB 17a, LotJN 949) highlight "the death by a kiss" as different from all other deaths because it is not caused by the Angel of Death (Sammael). This kind of death is granted to only a few people (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam). It might also just mean a "painless death." Additionally, it might also represent a taking back of Moses' breath; returning it to God.

214. *the mouth of God* The Midrashic play here, which connects this verse to the kiss God gives Moses' soul, is on the word "mouth" which means in Deut. 34:5 "at the command of." See parallels in YS VY, remez 604, MidrTan VE 6, and ARNA 12.

7.12 GOD AND THE ANGELS MOURN MOSES

ובכה עליו הקב"ה, והתחיל לקונן עליו שנאמר מי יקום לי עם מרעים מי יתיצב לי עם פועלי און, ומלאכי השרת בוכים ואומרים והחכמה מאין תמצא, והשמים אמרו אבד חסיד מן הארץ, והארץ אומרת וישר הארץ (Mic. 7:2).²¹⁷ And the ministering angels cried and said, "Where will you find such wisdom (Job 28:12)?"²¹⁶ And the heavens said, "A righteous man is perished from the earth (Mic. 7:2)."²¹⁷ And the earth says, "The upright

215. *Who will stand up for me* In the context of Ps. 94, the Psalmist asks this question, "Who will stand up for me against evil?" The answer in Ps. 94 is God, God will stand up for humanity when evil arises. But, here in MidrPM, it is God who is asking the question: "Who will stand up for God now that Moses is gone?" This question seems acutely painful for God as God mourns and laments Moses' death.

216. *find such wisdom* Even though God convinced the people of Israel that Joshua is as good a source of wisdom as Moses, the angels lament the loss of Moses' teaching and his interpretation of the Torah. In an effort to alleviate this sense of loss of wisdom, a different teaching (TY on Deut. 34:1ff) explains that Moses transferred the Spirit of Wisdom to Joshua.

217. *A righteous man...is no more* In this quote from Mic. 7:2, the heavens and earth focus on the loss of righteous Moses, but the second half of the verse illustrates the fear of what the loss of Moses might perpetuate, "All lie in wait to commit crimes, one traps the

[among] men is no more (ibid.)." And the stars and constellations, and sun and moon and Holy Spirit say, "There will never arise a prophet in Israel like Moses (Deut. 34:10).
באדם אין, וכוכבים ומזלות וחסמה ולבנה ורוח הקדש, אומרים ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה.

7.13 GOD'S FINAL PRAISE OF MOSES

Joshua looked for Moses, but he did not find him.²¹⁸ בקש יהושע את משה ולא מצאו, בא מטטרון לפני הקב"ה ואמר רבש"ע משה בחייו שלך ובמותו שלך, אמר הקב"ה למטטרון אני לא על משה בלבד אני מתנחם אלא עליו ועל כל ישראל, שהרבה

other in his net" (NJPS). The heavens and earth are worried that without Moses, people will become heathens. See parallels in YS VY, remez 604, DeutR 11:5 and 11:10, CJ 50:15, and Tos Sot 4:9.

218. *he did not find him* In many accounts of Moses' death (e.g. Jos 48), Moses just disappears and Jochebed and Joshua search everywhere for him (LotJ pg. 474ff). When Joshua realized Moses is dead, he rent his garments and cried aloud (YS VY, remez 605).

219. *Yours in his life and is Yours in his death* Metatron tries to comfort God by saying, "When Moses was alive, he was Yours, God, and now that he is dead, he is still Yours. Why are You weeping?" (Goldin, Studies in Midrash and Related Literature 1988, 185).

angered me, yet [Moses] prayed for them and placated פעמים הכעיסוני והתפלל עליהם
 me,²²⁰ as it says, *He executed The Eternal's justice and His* ומרצה אותי, שנאמר צדקת ה'
judgements with Israel (Deut. 33:21). And [Moses] said of עשה ומשפטיו עם ישראל, ואמר
 Me, '*The Eternal is God in heaven above and earth below* לפני כי ה' הוא האלהים בשמים
 (Deut. 4:39). Therefore, I acknowledge regarding him ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת. גם אני
 that, *Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like* מעיד עליו ולא קם נביא עוד כמשה
Moses – whom The Eternal knew face to face (Deut. אשר ידעו ה' פנים אל פנים וגו'
 34:10). *And for all the signs and wonders, and the great* לכל האותות והמופתים והיד
might and awesome power that Moses performed in the החזקה אשר עשה משה לעיני כל
sight of all Israel (Deut. 34:12).” ישראל.

This is the end and conclusion of the death our teacher, our תם ונשלם פטירת רבינו אדונינו
 master Moses, may he rest in peace. משה ע"ה.

220. *placated me* God points out to Metatron that he missed the point. There was something special about Moses' role while he was alive. Goldin explains, “His role as Israel's advocate on frequent critical occasions before a God given to anger, and his teaching [to] Israel, that only [The Eternal] is God, none else [(as cited in Deut. 4:39)]” (Goldin, *Studies in Midrash and Related Literature* 1988, 185) will be lost due to his death.

STRUCTURAL AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This study of MidrPM cites at least forty different sources and covers the broad selection of material presented in this midrash; everything from biblical to late midrashic sources. The question at the outset of this analysis is, “Was MidrPM just an anthology of these various traditions on Moses’ death?” or, “Was MidrPM edited together intentionally?” This analysis will show that MidrPM does appear to be more than an anthology of previous traditions, as its overall structure clearly points to an editorial hand. As such, a second question is worth considering, “How well was the material in MidrPM edited together and was it shaped thematically?”

To better understand this lengthy midrash, it is helpful to break it up into components. One option is to divide the midrash up into its fundamental parts, separating out all the distinct early sources utilized. This type of analysis would show how well (or poorly) each individual source was edited into MidrPM. However, just a quick read through MidrPM and even earlier parallels (e.g., DeutR) demonstrates that these earlier traditions are integrated with each other quite well. Thus, examining MidrPM this way would not yield answers to the questions on hand.

In order to reach a reasonable conclusion regarding the questions concerning MidrPM’s thematic editing, it is more helpful to examine MidrPM’s thematic motifs. These motifs are not limited to individual sources, but are reflected in different earlier *midrashim*. The exploration of these motifs can show how MidrPM is thoughtfully constructed and not haphazardly thrown together, because organization around themes shows intentional

selection by the hand of the editor. Additionally, thematic analysis also can show how well the editor spliced the material in MidrPM together; it can demonstrate how well one theme flows to the next.

Six major themes dominate MidrPM and each is denoted with a letter (A, B, C, D, E, F). The following are the list of motifs:

- A. Moses' Nature
- B. God's Involvement with Moses
- C. Moses' Petitions
- D. Moses and Joshua
- E. Moses' Departure from the People of Israel
- F. Moses and Sammael

Additionally, each sub-section of MidrPM is governed by one of these motifs. Below is a list of all the sub-sections in MidrPM. Each section is marked with its primary theme (denoted by the corresponding motif letter), and the section number and title. Some sections are left blank because they are further divided into smaller pieces, each of which has a different motif.

A	1	MOSES' NATURE
B	2	MOSES' MERIT
	3	MOSES' FATE
C	3.1	Moses Pleads with God
D	3.2	Moses Is Willing to Serve Joshua
A	3.3	Moses Compares himself to Other Biblical Heroes
C	3.4	Moses Pleads: People Might Speak Ill of Him
A	3.5	Moses' Sins
A	4	PARABLE: MOSES' LOSS OF POWER
	5	MOSES AND GOD DISCUSS MOSES' DEATH
C	5.1	Moses Praises God
A	5.2	God's Worry: Israel will Sin because of Moses
A	5.3	God and Moses Argue: To Whom is Moses' Equal?
B	5.4	God Praises Moses

- C 5.5 Moses Praises God
- C 5.6 God and Moses Beseech Each Other
- 6 **MOSES' PRAYER SHAKES THE HEAVENS**
- A 6.1 Moses Seals His Own Fate
- C 6.2 Moses' Prayer Shakes Heaven
- C 6.3 Moses' Request for Reward for His Leadership
- B 6.4 God Tries to Console Moses
- 7 **MOSES' FINAL DAYS AND HOURS**
- C 7.1 Moses' Final Days
- 7.2 Moses' Final Day
 - E 7.2.1 Moses' Final Words for the People
 - D 7.2.2 Moses Transfers Power/Knowledge to Joshua
 - D 7.2.3 Moses Serves Joshua
 - E 7.2.4 The People are Skeptical
 - D 7.2.5 Joshua is Embarrassed
- D 7.3 Five Hours Left: Moses and Joshua are the Same
- C 7.4 Four Hours Left: Moses Pleads with God
- A 7.5 Three Hours Left: Problems if Moses would Live
- F 7.6 Two Hours Left: Sammael's Joy
- 7.7 One Hour Left
 - C 7.7.1 Moses Asks Others for Help
 - D 7.7.2 Moses and God Prepare Joshua
 - E 7.7.3 Moses and the People Apologize to Each Other
- E 7.8 Half Hour Left: Moses Bids Farewell
- 7.9 A Moment and a Half Left
 - D 7.9.1 Moses Conveys Teaching to Joshua
 - A 7.9.2 Moses Loses His Ability to Teach
 - F 7.9.3 Sammael Tries to Take Moses' Soul
- F 7.10 A Moment Left: Sammael Tries Again
- 7.11 Moses' Time is Up
 - C 7.11.1 Moses Prays For God to Take Him
 - B 7.11.2 God Takes Moses' Soul
- B 7.12 God and the Angels Mourn Moses
- B 7.13 God's Final Praise of Moses

Explanation of the Motifs

A. Moses' Nature This motif includes everything about Moses and the nature of his being, including his power and his faults. MidrPM is extremely concerned with Moses' essential nature, especially compared with God, the angels, other Jewish heroes, and the rest of humanity. The question, "Is Moses a divine or human?" is

paramount in this midrash. To elucidate the ambiguity of Moses' character, MidrPM seems to elevate him above Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – some of them multiple times. At times, Moses even appears to have more power than God; his stature and example amongst the People of Israel seem to have more direct influence on them than God's own commandments. Even the angels cannot interact with Moses as they would with regular humans; he defeats them in order to receive Torah and rather than being buried by them, only God has the power to bury him. However, despite Moses' "god-like" power, he is still human – he sins and, like all humans, must die. Finally, MidrPM implies that Moses' power is derived from his ability to teach. The midrash's final expression of Moses' power is actually the loss of his power to teach, and when he loses that power, he is ready to die.

B. God's Involvement with Moses MidrPM focuses on Moses' uniqueness as compared, not only to the rest of humanity, but even to the angels. This motif recognizes that uniqueness by emphasizing all of the moments when God busies God's self with Moses; God not only buries Moses, but also praises, consoles, and mourns for him. According to MidrPM, much of the merit Moses earned, resulting in God's own involvement with him, was due to Moses remembering to remove Joseph's bones from Egypt at the beginning of the Exodus.

C. Moses' Petitions This motif includes all of Moses' pleas for help; most, but not all are direct pleas to God. Over and over Moses beseeches God to let him enter the Land of Israel and remain alive. He believes he deserves this as a reward for his years of service leading the Israelite people out of Egypt and through the wilderness. Eventually, Moses'

pleas are so powerful that they shake the very heavens and terrify the angels. However, God doesn't grant any of Moses' prayers and, in a last effort, Moses turns to all of creation to beseech God on his behalf. After realizing that creation cannot help him, Moses concedes and prays for God to take him.

D. Moses and Joshua This motif reflects Moses and Joshua's relationship in the last moments of Moses' life. In an effort to remain a part of the Israelite people, Moses resolves to serve Joshua, just as Joshua served him for thirty-six years. However, the service of his beloved teacher embarrasses Joshua and confuses the Israelite people who do not want to follow Joshua's leadership while Moses is still alive. Eventually, Moses transfers his power to Joshua and he, along with God, prepare Joshua to lead the Israelite people. This transfer of power concludes as Moses transfers all of his power to teach Torah over to Joshua.

E. Moses' Departure from the People of Israel This motif includes all of Moses' final interactions with the Israelites, including Moses' final words to and blessing of Israel. Additionally, this theme includes the Israelite People's skepticism of Joshua's appointment to power. This particular section (Section 7.2.4) at first may not appear to fall under this motif. However, the Israelites' skepticism of Joshua is manifest in their refusal to respond to Moses' request to appear at Joshua's tent. In Moses' final moments, the Israelites' intense desire for Moses to remain their leader allows them to subvert even Moses' command. Finally, as Moses bids farewell to the Israelite People, both he and the Israelites acknowledge that their journey together has not always been easy; both have

“sinned” against the other. In a final moment of reconciliation, Moses and the Israelite People apologize to each other.

F. Moses and Sammael As Moses’ time on earth nears its end, Sammael, the angel who takes all human souls, begins to celebrate his opportunity to take Moses’ righteous soul. This motif includes each moment MidrPM refers to Sammael as he attempts to retrieve Moses’ soul. When Moses’ time on earth has concluded, God sends Sammael to take Moses’ soul, but Moses refuses to go with the Angel of Death; Moses’ purity and righteousness is too much for Sammael to handle. When he fails to acquire Moses’ soul, Sammael returns to God disheartened. God chastises Sammael for his excitement about Moses’ imminent death and send him off to try again. When he returns to Moses a second time, Moses attacks him with his staff and drives him off for good.

Structural Analysis

By looking at the structure of MidrPM, an editorial hand becomes evident. This section will analyze how MidrPM “folds” each motif together to create a more seamless whole. The process of “folding” is important to MidrPM, because as the midrash progresses, various motifs are either “unfolded” and expanded or “folded” and condensed. Some of these motifs begin condensed and “unfold” slowly throughout the midrash, while others start “unfolded” and condense as the midrash progresses to make room for new motifs.

In addition to the “folding” and “unfolding” of MidrPM’s six motifs, it is possible to divide MidrPM almost in half thematically. Sections 1-6 utilize almost exclusively motifs A (Moses’ Nature) and C (Moses’ Petitions); of the eighteen classified parts of these

sections, fourteen are dominated by these two motifs. Contrastingly, Section 7 deals in various ways with Moses' death and departure from the land of the living.

Literarily, it makes sense for MidrPM to begin with the "unfolding" of motifs A and C because it creates tension in the midrash. Motif A expounds on Moses' nature and power which in essence is closer to the divine than human. But, part of Moses' nature is that he also sins which God seeks to punish. Motif C "unfolds" beside motif A, with the text moving back and forth between them, not only as a way for Moses to petition God regarding his impending punishment, but also for MidrPM to explore Moses' nature in a more nuanced way.

The tension is created in two ways. First, the reader does not know whether God will accept Moses' plea; after all, Moses is unique. But, second and perhaps more relevant to the midrash as a whole, is Moses' nature compared to God. The tension between motifs A and C poses the question, "Is Moses as powerful as God?" If Moses is allowed to live and enter the Promised Land, the answer would seem to be "Yes." As this first part of the midrash concludes, it appears that the answer to the question is "No," Moses will not be allowed to remain alive or enter the Promised Land; God is more powerful than Moses.

Section 7 can also be divided into two parts. Part one is Section 7.1 through Section 7.8 which is dominated by motif D (Moses and Joshua) and E (Moses' Departure from the People of Israel); of the fourteen sections in this part, nine involve these themes. Part two is Section 7.9 through 7.13 which is dominated by motif B (God's Involvement with Moses) and motif F (Moses and Sammael); of the eight sections in this part, five focuses on these themes.

Section 7 begins with motif C which allows for a smooth transition between the first half and second half of MidrPM, but the motif shifts in focus. Instead of petitioning to remain alive, Moses makes a suggestion for his choice of successor. This shift seems to send the message that Moses has accepted his fate and is ready to die. Supporting this notion, motifs D and E highlight Moses' attempt to transfer power to Joshua and Moses' departure from the People of Israel.

As motif D begins to "unfold," the editorial hand of MidrPM becomes evident. Section 3.2 introduces the reader to motif D as Moses tries to serve Joshua in an effort to remain alive. This small taste of motif D, which fits smoothly into the first half of MidrPM, allows the reader feel more comfortable with motif D when it eventually does "unfold" with Joshua supplanting Moses.

Adding to the smooth transition from the first half to the second half of MidrPM is the change in nature of motif D. Just as the focus of motif C changes from Moses' focus on himself to the sustainability of the leadership of the Israelite People, motif D makes a similar shift in focus. Whereas in Section 3.2 Moses is willing to serve Joshua as a way to protect himself, here (Sections 7.2.2 and 7.2.3) Moses appears to serve Joshua so as to help him transition into the role of leader.

As MidrPM begins to "unfold" the familiar motif D, it strategically introduces a new, unfamiliar, motif to the narrative, motif E, Moses' departure from the people. The placement of this new motif makes sense both structurally and literarily. Structurally, because it is embedded within a familiar motif which lessens the shock the reader feels when reading it; Joshua will be there when Moses dies. Literarily, just as Moses has to

prepare Joshua for his role as leader, it makes sense that Moses has to do the same for those who are going to be led, a.k.a. the Israelite People.

Half way through the first part of Section 7, MidrPM “folds” in the familiar motifs (A and C) from the first half of MidrPM, thus reinserting the tension which appeared to have been resolved (in Sections 7.4 and 7.5). All of the sudden, the transfer of power from Moses to Joshua and the future of the Israelite People appears uncertain. This is the height of tension in MidrPM; everything appears to be in flux and a resolution seems far from sight.

Amidst all this tension, MidrPM introduces motif F and Sammael (Sections 7.6, 7.9.3, and 7.10). Where motif E was introduced in a way that felt smooth, motif F is introduced to heighten tension and increase the drama of the midrash. Of course, literarily, it makes sense to introduce Sammael in this way because he is the embodiment of the chaos that appears on the brink of death.

To resolve this moment of heightened uncertainty, motif C reappears with a different focus as Moses makes a final plea, not to God, but to all of creation (Section 7.7.1). This final plea of desperation fails and Moses finally accepts his impending death. The tension of Moses vs. God’s power, which exists throughout most of the midrash, finally begins to resolve on the side of God. In the last acts of Moses’ life, MidrPM focuses on motifs D and E, the transfer of power to Joshua and Moses’ departure from the Israelite people.

In what would seem to be the final moment of Moses’ life, MidrPM “folds” back in motif A (Moses’ Nature), referring back to the opening of the midrash. This motif, which dominates, most of the first half of MidrPM and contributes to much of the tension in MidrPM, ends when Moses loses his ability to teach Torah. The final mention of this motif

(Section 7.9.2) represents the end of Moses' power on earth and the end of his life. So, it is significant that Moses' power truly lies in his ability to teach. Despite all that Moses argues in the first half of MidrPM, MidrPM makes a point of emphasizing that the essence of Moses' power – his life force even – rests solely in his ability to teach Torah.

Finally, as we would expect for any human, MidrPM reintroduces and focuses on motif F and Sammael. Sammael, who is responsible for all the souls in the world, comes for Moses' soul as he would for any other human soul. For any other person, MidrPM would end here, but not for Moses who merits God's attention.

MidrPM surprisingly reintroduces motif B (God's Involvement with Moses), effectively bookending the midrash with this motif. The ending of MidrPM highlights motif B and elevates Moses above all humans. This structure helps explain the messages the editor wants to send the reader: Moses was greater than all humanity, he was unique, and merited God's special attention beyond all others.

The "folding" and "unfolding" of motifs in MidrPM defines its structure and helps to create and then alleviate tension throughout the midrash. Continuity is created throughout the midrash as various motifs are continually woven in, at times, creating a sense of familiarity. At other times, new motifs are "unfolded" out of nowhere to heighten the tension. This carefully crafted structure and selection of motifs points to a clever editor of the traditions surrounding Moses' death who clearly wanted to focus on the uniqueness Moses' merit.

Conclusion

This stunning midrash about the final moments of Moses' life helps elucidate those questions raised in the Introduction. MidrPM does a wonderful job filling in the gaps in the biblical text and exploring the very human emotions and struggles Moses, Joshua, and Israel must have experienced at the end of Moses' life. Moses fears death and longs to finish his life's work. Joshua is hesitant and fears taking over his teacher's position. The People of Israel bemoan the loss of their leader and are fearful of a new one.

These very real emotions are true of each of us who read MidrPM as well. They speak to us whenever we pass from one juncture in our lives to the next. It doesn't have only to be from life to death. Whenever we change jobs, we like Moses wonder about the work left undone. We wonder whether we did enough, or if the person taking over will be capable of filling our shoes. We wonder if we will be recognized for what we did accomplish, and if people will remember us. We feel like Joshua, shaking and trembling, whenever we take on the role of a parent or teacher or when we reach new levels of leadership. We might even feel anxious like the Israelite People when our leaders retire, only to be replaced by new young blood.

These emotions ring true for any Jewish community who enters a period of transition. Will the new leader be as powerful and charismatic as the last? Does she have enough experience to even lead the congregation? Can the old leader remain part of the community, or must she completely leave in order for the transition to be successful?

Most powerfully though, MidrPM focuses on Moses' relationship with God. The reader of the midrash is left for the majority of the narrative wondering about the nature of Moses.

Moses wields Divine power in his staff, he has the power to influence the Israelite people more than God's commandments, and he is even so powerful that the angels cannot bury him. MidrPM explains that despite all his power, Moses is still human, and what separates God from man is death. Therefore, not for any sin he committed, but merely because he is not God, Moses must meet the same end as all other humans.

But, MidrPM teaches that a righteous life can be rewarded even in death. Moses merits God attending to him at his death because he remembered Joseph's bones. He remembered his ancestors and carried them and his people on his back to the Promised Land. How did he do this? MidrPM explains that this was not with the power of God's staff, but rather with his ability to teach Torah. Moses' strength emanated from his ability to bring Torah into the lives of the Israelites in a way which respected his ancestors and affirmed his relationship with God. If Moses' righteousness emanated from the power to teach Torah, then perhaps if we use Moses as our model teacher, we, too, can merit being with God in life as well as in death.

This is the conclusion and end of our teacher Moses, who in life gave the Jewish people the Torah, and through his teachings, merited God's presence in death.

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